A NEW HEINLEIN NOVEL

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

AUGUST 35¢

HAVE SPACESUIT—WILL TRAVEL

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

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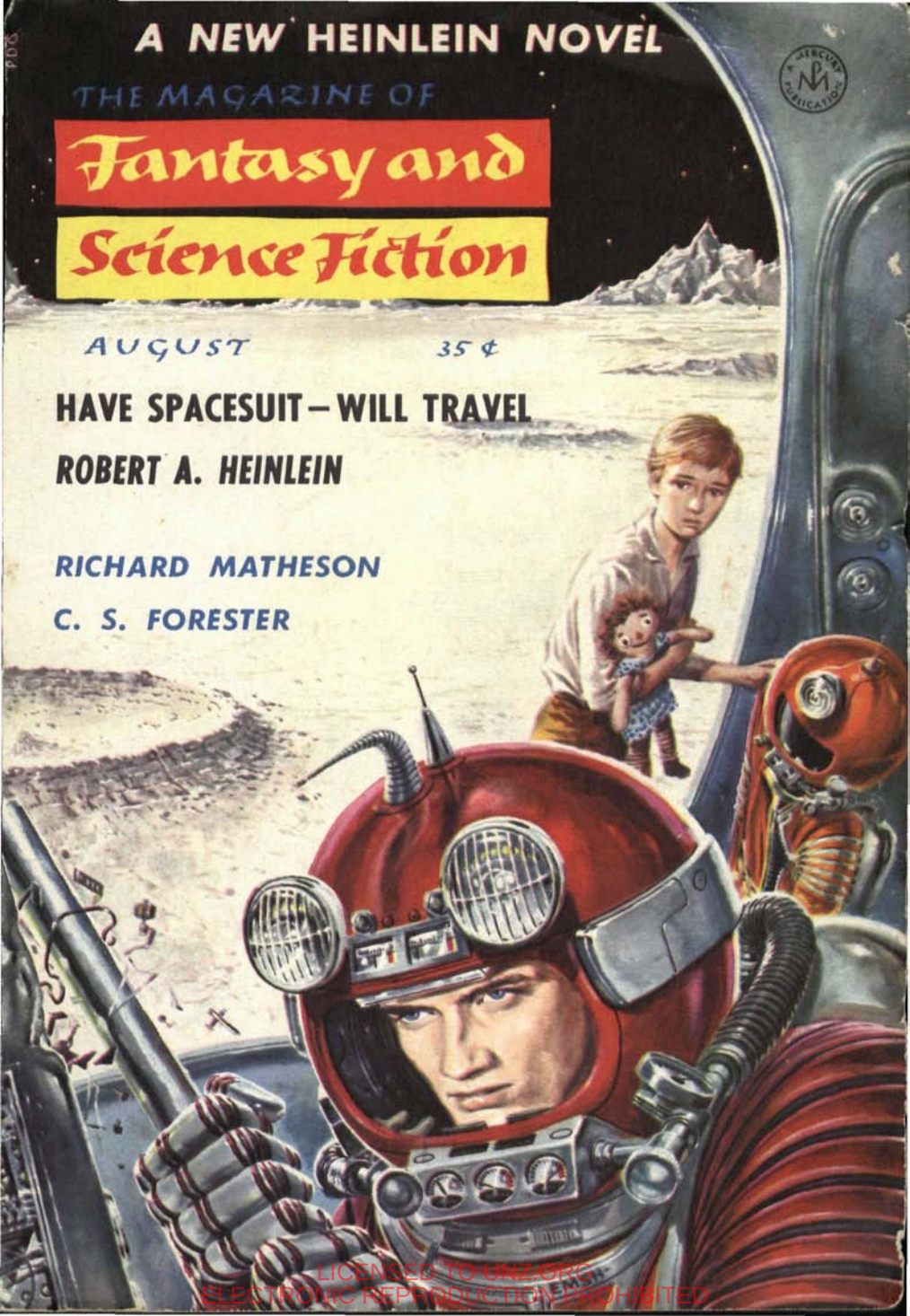
C. S. FORESTER



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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 15, No. 2 AUGUST

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Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 15, No. 2, Whole No. 87, AUG. 1958. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $4.00 in U. S. and Possessions, Canada and the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and general offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. *© 1958 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved.* *Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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Coming Next Month

In next month's installment of *Have Space Suit—Will Travel,* Robert A. Heinlein moves in for a closeup of life and allied adventurous matters on Pluto, and beyond. Along with these remarkable travels of Kip and Peewee, we will present: Another F&SF "First"—*Casey Agonistes,* by Richard McKenna, a harsh yet warming tale that marks an impressive debut.... An article by Dr. William C. Boyd that in a surprisingly comprehensible way follows Einsteinian relativity around curved space to its last tail-in-mouth paradox.... A walloping, zestful voyage on *That Hell-Bound Train,* with one of the most unpredictable humorists of them all, Robert Bloch....*Poet in Residence,* by Willard Marsh, in which a dreamy young poet and a clever old businessman battle it out for the youth of one and the immense fortune of the other.... Plus one or two other fine things which cap off an issue you simply must not miss.

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If the very thought of a new Heinlein novel doesn't overstimulate your salivary glands, no words of mine will do so. For almost two decades (he made his debut in Astounding *just 19 years ago this month), Heinlein has been showing the rest of us what science fiction is and how to write it; and he gets, if possible, even better with the years.*

Just in case, however, you are a newcomer to this kind of reading, you'll watnt to know that this latest Heinlein, exciting in action and provocative in thinking, is a particularly fine example of what one might call gradualism. I can't recall that the author has ever begun a story on such a simple, realistic, this-could-happen-first-thing-tomorrow-morning level. This is the future as we can almost taste it this very moment. And from there he leads you . . . well, it would be unfair to anticipate his startling revelations of the extent of space-time and our place therein. But along the way you'll find spectacular perils, fascinating people (not all of them human)—and an illuminating compendious course on the nature and needs of space suits.

Have Space Suit—Will Travel

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

(First of three parts)

YOU SEE, I HAD THIS SPACE SUIT.

How it happened was this way:

"Dad," I said, "I want to go to the Moon."

"Certainly," he answered and looked back at his book. It was Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, which he must know by heart.

I said, "Dad, please! I'm serious."

This time he closed the book on a finger and said gently, "I said it was all right. Go ahead."

"Yes . . . but *how*?"

"Eh?" He looked mildly surprised. "Why, that's your problem, Clifford."

Dad was like that. The time I told him I wanted to buy a bicycle he said, "Go right ahead," without glancing up—so I had gone to the money basket in the dining room, intending to take enough

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for a bicycle. But there had been only 11 dollars and 43 cents in it, so about a thousand miles of mowed lawns later I bought a bicycle. I hadn't said any more to Dad because if money wasn't in the basket, it wasn't anywhere; Dad didn't bother with banks—just the money basket and one next to it marked UNCLE SAM, the contents of which he bundled up and mailed to the government once a year. This caused the Internal Revenue Service considerable headache and once they sent a man to remonstrate with him.

First the man demanded, then he pleaded. "But, Dr. Russell, we know your background. You've no excuse for not keeping proper records."

"But I do," Dad told him. "Up here." He tapped his forehead.

"The law requires written records."

"Look again," Dad advised him. "The law can't even require a man to read and write. More coffee?"

The man tried to get Dad to pay by check or money order. Dad read him the fine print on a dollar bill, the part about "legal tender for all debts, public and private."

In a despairing effort to get *something* out of the trip he asked Dad *please* not to fill in the space marked OCCUPATION with *SPY*.

"Why not?"

"What? Why, because you *aren't*—and it upsets people."

"Have you checked with the FBI?"

"Eh? No."

"They probably wouldn't answer. But you've been very polite. I'll mark it 'Unemployed Spy.' OK?"

The tax man almost forgot his brief case. Nothing fazed Dad, he meant what he said, he wouldn't argue and he never gave in. So when he told me I could go to the Moon but the means were up to me he meant just that. I could go tomorrow—provided I could wangle a billet in a spaceship.

But he added meditatively, "There must be a number of ways to get to the Moon, Son. Better check 'em all. Reminds me of this passage I'm reading. They're trying to open a tin of pineapple and Harris has left the can opener back in London. They try several ways." He started to read aloud and I sneaked out—I had heard that passage five hundred times.

I went to my workshop in the barn and thought about ways. One way was to go to the Air Academy at Colorado Springs—*if* I got an appointment, *if I* graduated, *if* I managed to get picked for the Federation Space Corps, there was a chance that some day I would be ordered to Lunar Base, or at least one of the satellite stations.

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Another way was to study engineering, get a job in jet propulsion, and buck for a spot that would get me sent to the Moon. Dozens, maybe hundreds, of engineers had been to the Moon, or were stlll there—for all sorts of work, electronics, cryogenics, metallurgy, ceramics, air-conditioning, as well as rocket engineering.

Oh, yes! Out of a million engineers a handful got picked for the Moon. Shucks, I rarely got picked even playing post office.

Or a man could be an M.D., or a lawyer, or geologist, or toolmaker, and wind up on the Moon at a fat salary—provided they wanted him and nobody else. I didn't care about salary—but how do you arrange to be number-one in your specialty?

And there was the straightforward way: trundle in a wheelbarrow of money and buy a ticket.

This I would never manage—I had 87 cents at that moment—but it had caused me to think about it steadily. Of the boys in our school half admitted that they wanted to space, half pretended not to care, knowing how feeble the chances were—plus a handful of creeps who wouldn't leave Earth for any reason. But we talked about it and some of us were determined to go. I didn't break into a rash until American Express and Thos. Cook & Son announced tourist excursions.

I saw their ads in *National Geographic* while waiting to have my teeth cleaned. After that I never was the same.

The idea that any rich man could simply lay cash on the line and *go* was more than I could stand. I just *had* to go. I would never be able to pay for it—or, at least, that was so far in the future there was no use thinking about it. So what could I do to be *sent?*

You see stories about boys, poor-but-honest, who go to the top because they're smarter than anyone in the county, maybe the state. But they're not talking about me. I was in the top quarter of my graduating class but they do not give scholarships to M.I.T. for that—not from Centerville High. I am stating a fact; our high school isn't very good. It's great to go to—we're league champions in basketball and our square-dance team is state runner-up and we have a swell sock hop every Wednesday. Lots of school spirit.

But not much studying.

The emphasis is on what our principal, Mr. Hanley, calls "preparation for life" rather than on trigonometry. Maybe it does prepare you for life; it certainly doesn't prepare you for Cal Tech.

I didn't find this out myself. Sophomore year I brought home a questionnaire cooked up by our group project in "Family Living"

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in social studies. One question read: *"How is your family council organized?"*

At dinner I said, "Dad, how is our family council organized?"

Mother said, "Don't disturb your father, dear."

Dad said, "Eh? Let me see that."

He read it, then told me to fetch my textbooks. I had not brought them home, so he sent me to school to get them. Fortunately the building was open—rehearsals for the Fall Blow-Out. Dad rarely gave orders but when he did he expected results.

I had a swell course that semester: social studies, commercial arithmetic, applied English (the class had picked "Slogan Writing" which was fun), handicrafts (we were building sets for the Blow-Out), and gym—which was basketball practice for me; I wasn't tall enough for first team but a reliable substitute gets his varsity letter his senior year. All in all, I was doing well in school and knew it.

Dad read all my textbooks that night; he is a fast reader. In social studies I reported that our family was an informal democracy; it got by—the class was arguing whether the chairmanship of a council should rotate or be elective, and whether a grandparent living in the home was eligible. We decided that a grandparent was a member but should not be chairman, then we formed committees to draw up a constitution for an ideal family organization, which we would present to our families as the project's findings.

Dad was around school a good bit the next few days, which worried me—when parents get over-active they are always up to something.

The following Saturday evening Dad called me into his study. He had a stack of textbooks on his desk and a chart of Centerville High School's curriculum, from American Folk Dancing to Life Sciences. Marked on it was my course, not only for that semester but for junior and senior years.

Dad stared at me like a gentle grasshopper and said mildly, "Kip, do you intend to go to college?"

"Huh? Why, certainly, Dad!"

"With what?"

I hesitated. I knew it cost money. While there had been times when dollar bills spilled out of the basket onto the floor, usually it wouldn't take long to count what was in it. "Uh, maybe I'll get a scholarship. Or I could work my way."

He nodded. "No doubt . . . If you want to. Money problems can always be solved by a man not frightened by them. But when I said, 'With what?' I was talking about up *here*." He tapped his skull.

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I simply stared. "Why, I'll graduate from high school, Dad. That'll get me into college."

"So it will. Into our State University, or the State Aggie, or State Normal. But, Kip, do you know that they are flunking out forty percent of each freshman class?"

"I wouldn't flunk!"

"Perhaps not. But you will if you tackle any serious subject—engineering, or science, or pre-med. You would, that is to say, if your preparation were based on *this*." He waved a hand at the curriculum.

I felt shocked. "Why, Dad, Center is a swell school." I remembered things they had told us in P.T.A. Auxiliary. "It's run along the latest, most scientific lines, approved by psychologists, and—"

"And paying excellent salaries," he interrupted, "for a staff highly trained in modern pedagogy. Study projects emphasize practical human problems to orient the child in democratic social living, to fit him for the vital, meaningful tests of adult life in our complex modern culture. Excuse me, son; I've talked with Mr. Hanley. Mr. Hanley is sincere—and to achieve these noble purposes we are spending more per student than is any other state save California and New York."

"Well . . . what's wrong with that?"

"What's a dangling participle?"

I didn't answer. He went on, "Why did Van Buren fail in re-election? How do you extract the cube root of eighty-seven?"

Van Buren had been a president; that was all I remembered. But I could answer the other one. "If you want a cube root, you look in a table in the back of the book."

Dad sighed. "Kip, do you think that table was brought down from on high by an archangel?" He shook his head sadly. "It's my fault, not yours. I should have looked into this years ago—but I had assumed, simply because you liked to read and were quick at figures and clever with your hands, that you were getting an education."

"You think I'm not?"

"I know you are not. Son, Centerville High is a delightful place, well equipped, smoothly administered, beautifully kept. Not a 'blackboard jungle,' oh, no!—I think you kids love the place. You should. But *this*—" Dad slapped the curriculum chart angrily. "Twaddle! Beetle tracking! Occupational therapy for morons!"

I didn't know what to say. Dad sat and brooded. At last he said, "The law declares that you must attend school until you are eighteen or have graduated from high school."

"Yes, sir."

"The school you are in is a waste of time. The toughest

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course we can pick won't stretch your mind. But it's either this school, or send you away."

I said, "Doesn't that cost a lot of money?"

He ignored my question. "I don't favor boarding schools, a teen-ager belongs with his family. Oh, a tough prep school back east can drill you so that you can enter Stanford, or Yale, or any of the best—but you can pick up false standards, too: nutty ideas about money and social position and the right tailor. It took me years to get rid of ones I acquired that way. Your mother and I did not pick a small town for your boyhood unpurposefully. So you'll stay in Centerville High."

I looked relieved.

"Nevertheless you intend to go to college. Do you intend to become a professional man? Or will you look for snap courses in more elaborate ways to make bayberry candles? Son, your life is yours, to do with as you wish. But if you have any thought of going to a good university and studying anything of importance, then we must consider how to make best use of your next three years."

"Why, gosh, Dad, of course I want to go to a good—"

"See me when you've thought it over. Good night."

I did for a week. And, you know, I began to see that Dad was right. Our project in "Family Living" was twaddle. What did those kids know about running a family? Or Miss Finchley?—unmarried and no kids. The class decided unanimously that every child should have a room of his own, and be given an allowance "to teach him to handle money." Great stuff . . . but how about the Quinlan family, nine kids in a five-room house? Let's not be foolish.

Commercial arithmetic wasn't silly but it was a waste of time. I read the book through the first week; after that I was bored.

Dad switched me to algebra, Spanish, general science, English grammar and composition; the only thing unchanged was gym. I didn't have it too tough catching up; even those courses were watered down. Nevertheless, I started to learn, for Dad threw a lot of books at me and said, "Clifford, you would be studying these if you were not in overgrown kindergarten. If you soak up what is in them, you should be able to pass College Entrance Board Examinations. Possibly."

After that he left me alone; he meant it when he said that it was my choice. I almost bogged down—those books were *hard,* not the predigested pap I got in school. Anybody who thinks that studying Latin by himself is a snap should try it.

I got discouraged and nearly quit—then I got mad and leaned into it. After a while I found that

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Latin was making Spanish easier and vice versa. When Miss Hernandez, my Spanish teacher, found out I was studying Latin, she began tutoring me. I not only worked my way through Virgil, I learned to speak Spanish like a Mexicano.

Algebra and plane geometry were all the math our school offered; I went ahead on my own with advanced algebra and solid geometry and trigonometry and might have stopped so far as College Boards were concerned—but math is worse than peanuts. Analytical geometry seems pure Greek until you see what they're driving at—then, if you know algebra, it bursts on you and you race through the rest of the book. Glorious!

I had to sample calculus and when I got interested in electronics I needed vector analysis. General science was the only science course the school had and pretty general it was, too—about Sunday-supplement level. But when you read about chemistry and physics you want to do it, too. The barn was mine and I had a chem lab and a darkroom and an electronics bench and, for a while, a ham station. Mother was perturbed when I blew out the windows and set fire to the barn—just a small fire—but Dad was not. He simply suggested that I not manufacture explosives in a frame building—I had been trying to cast solid charges for a small two-stage rocket.

When I took the College Boards my senior year I passed them.

It was early March my senior year that I told Dad I wanted to go to the Moon. The idea had been made acute by the announcement of commercial flights but I had been "space happy" ever since the day they announced that the Federation Space Corps had established a lunar base. Or earlier. I told Dad about my decision because I felt that he would know the answer. You see, Dad always found ways to do anything he decided to do.

When I was little we lived lots of places—Washington, New York, Los Angeles, I don't know where—usually in hotel apartments. Dad was always flying somewhere and when he was home there were visitors; I never saw him much. Then we moved to Centerville and he was always home, his nose in a book or working at his desk. When people wanted to see him they had to come to him. I remember once, when the money basket was empty, Dad told Mother that "a royalty was due." I hung around that day because I had never seen a king (I was eight) and when a visitor showed up I was disappointed because he didn't wear a crown. There was money in the basket the next day so I decided that he had been

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incognito (I was reading *The Little Lame Prince*) and had tossed Dad a purse of gold; it was at least a year before I found out that a "royalty" could be money from a patent or a book or business stock, and some of the glamour went out of life. But this visitor, though not a king, thought he could make Dad do what he wanted rather than what Dad wanted:

"Dr. Russell, I concede that Washington has an atrocious climate. But you will have air-conditioned offices."

"With clocks, no doubt. And secretaries. And soundproofing."

"Anything you want, Doctor."

"The point is, Mr. Secretary, I don't want them. This household has no clocks. Nor calendars. Once I had a large income and a larger ulcer; I now have a small income and no ulcer. I stay here."

"But the job needs *you*."

"The need is not mutual. Do have some more meat loaf."

Since Dad did not want to go to the Moon, the problem was mine. I got down college catalogs I had collected and started listing engineering schools. I had no idea how I could pay tuition or even eat—but the first thing was to get myself accepted by a tough school with a reputation.

If not, I could enlist in the Air Force and try for an appointment. If I missed, I could become an enlisted specialist in electronics; Lunar Base used radar and astrar techs. One way or another, I was going.

Next morning at breakfast Dad was hidden behind the New York *Times* while Mother read the *Herald-Trib*. I had the Centerville *Clarion* but it's fit only for wrapping salami. Dad looked over his paper at me. "Clifford, here's something in your line."

"Huh?"

"Don't grunt; that is an uncouth privilege of seniors. This." He handed it to me.

It was a soap ad.

It announced that tired old gimmick, a gigantic supercolossal prize contest. This one promised a thousand prizes down to a last hundred each of which was a year's supply of Skyway Soap.

Then I spilled cornflakes in my lap. The first prize was—

"AN ALL-EXPENSE TRIP TO THE MOON!!!"

That's the way it read, with three exclamation points—only to me there were a dozen, with bursting bombs and a heavenly choir.

Just complete this sentence in 25 words or less: "I use Skyway Soap because . . ."

(And send in the usual soap wrapper or reasonable facsimile.)

There was more about "—joint management of American Express and Thos. Cook—" and "—with the cooperation of the United States Air Force—" and a list of

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lesser prizes. But all I saw, while milk and soggy cereal soaked my pants, was:

"TRIP TO THE MOON!!!"

II

First I went sky high with excitement . . . then as far down with depression. I didn't win contests—why, if I bought a box of Cracker Jack, I'd get one they forgot to put a prize in. I had been cured of matching pennies. If I ever—

"Stop it," said Dad.

I shut up.

"There is no such thing as luck; there is only adequate or inadequate preparation to cope with a statistical universe. Do you intend to enter this?"

"Do I!"

"I assume that to be affirmative. Very well, make a systematic effort."

I did and Dad was helpful—he didn't just offer me more meat loaf. But he saw to it that I didn't go to pieces; I finished school and sent off applications for college and kept my job. I was working after school that semester at Charton's Pharmacy — soda jerk, but also learning about pharmacy. Mr. Charton was too conscientious to let me touch anything but packaged items, but I learned—materia medica and nomenclature and what various antibiotics were for and why you had to be careful. That led into organic chemistry and biochemistry and he lent me Walker, Boyd & Asimov — biochemistry makes atomic physics look simple, but presently it begins to make sense.

Mr. Charton was an old widower and pharmacology was his life. He hinted that someone would have to carry on the pharmacy some day—some young fellow with a degree in pharmacy and devotion to the profession. He said that he might be able to help such a person get through school. If he had suggested that I could some day run the dispensary at Lunar Base, I might have taken the bait. I explained that I was dead set on spacing, and engineering looked like my one chance.

He didn't laugh. He said I was probably right—but I shouldn't forget that wherever Man went, to the Moon, or Mars, or the farthest stars, pharmacists and dispensaries would go along. Then he dug out books for me on space medicine — Strughold and Haber and Stapp and others. "I once had ideas along that line, Kip," he said quietly, "but now it's too late."

Even though Mr. Charton was not really interested in anything but drugs we sold everything that drugstores sell, from bicycle tires to home-permanent kits.

Including soap, of course.

We were selling little Skyway

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Soap; Centerville is conservative about new brands—I'll bet some of them made their own soap. But when I showed up for work that day I had to tell Mr. Charton about it. He dug out two dust-covered boxes and put them on a counter. Then he phoned his jobber in Springfield.

He really did right by me. He marked Skyway Soap down almost to cost and pushed it—and he almost always got the wrappers before he let the customer go. Me, I stacked a pyramid of Skyway Soap on each end of the fountain and every coke was accompanied by a spiel for good old Skyway, the soap that washes cleaner, is packed with vitamins, and improves your chances of Heaven, not to mention its rich creamy lather, finer ingredients, and refusal to take the Fifth Amendment. Oh, I was shameless! Anybody who got away without buying was deaf or fast on his feet.

If he bought soap without leaving the wrappers with me he was a magician. Adults I talked out of it; kids, if I had to, I paid a penny for each wrapper. If they brought in wrappers from around town, I paid a dime a dozen and threw in a cone. The rules permitted a contestant to submit any number of entries as long as each was written on a Skyway Soap wrapper or reasonable facsimile.

I considered photographing one and turning out facsimiles by the gross, but Dad advised me not to. "It is within the rules, Kip, but I've never yet known a skunk to be welcome at a picnic."

So I sold soap. And I sent in wrappers with slogans:

I use Skyway Soap because—
—it makes me feel so clean.
—highway or byway, there's no soap like Skyway!
—its quality is sky high.
it is pure as the Milky Way.
—it is pure as Interstellar Space.
—it leaves me fresh as a rain-swept sky.

And so on endlessly, until I tasted soap in my dreams.

Not just my own, either; Dad thought them up, and so did Mother and Mr. Charton. I kept a notebook and wrote them down in school or at work or in the middle of the night. I came home one evening and found that Dad had set up a card file for me and after that I kept them alphabetically to avoid repeating. A good thing, too, for toward the last I sent in as many as a hundred a day. Postage mounted, not to mention having to buy some wrappers.

Other kids in town were in the contest and probably some adults, but they didn't have the production line I had. I'd leave work at ten o'clock, hurry home with the day's slogans and wrappers, pick up more slogans from Dad and Mother, then use a rubber stamp

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on the inside of each wrapper: *I use Skyway Soap because*— with my name and address. As I typed, Dad filled out file cards. Each morning I mailed the bunch on my way to school.

I got laughed at but the adults most inclined to kid me were quickest to let me have their wrappers.

All but one, an oaf called "Ace" Quiggle. I shouldn't class Ace as adult; he was an over-age juvenile delinquent. I guess every town has at least one Ace. He hadn't finished Centerville High, a distinction since Mr. Hanley believed in promoting everybody "to keep age groups together." As far back as I remember Ace hung around Main Street, sometimes working, mostly not.

He specialized in "wit." He was at our fountain one day, using up two dollars worth of space and time for one 35-cent malt. I had just persuaded old Mrs. Jenkins to buy a dozen cakes and had relieved her of the wrappers. As she left Ace picked one off my counter display and said, "You're selling these, Space Cadet?"

"That's right, Ace. You'll never find such a bargain again."

"You expect to go to the Moon, just selling soap, Captain? Or should I say 'Commodore'? Yuk yuk yukkity yuk!" That's how Ace laughed, like a comic strip.

"I'm trying," I said politely. "How about some?"

"You're sure it's good soap?"

"Positive."

"Well, I'll tell you. Just to help you out—I'll buy one bar."

A plunger. But this might be the winning wrapper. "Sure thing, Ace. Thanks a lot." I took his money, he slipped the cake into his pocket and started to leave. "Just a second, Ace. The wrapper. Please?"

He stopped. "Oh, yes." He took out the bar, peeled it, held up the wrapper. "You want this?"

"Yes, Ace. Thanks."

"Well, I'll show you how to get the best use out of it." He reached across to the cigar lighter on the tobacco counter and set fire to it, lit a cigarette with it, let the wrapper burn almost to his fingers, dropped it and stepped on it.

Mr. Charton watched from the window of the dispensary.

Ace grinned. "OK, Space Cadet?"

I was gripping the ice-cream scoop. But I answered, "Perfectly OK, Ace. It's your soap."

Mr. Charton came out and said, "I'll take the fountain, Kip. There's a package to deliver."

That was almost the only wrapper I missed. The contest ended May 1 and both Dad and Mr. Charton decided to stock up and cleaned out the last case in the store. It was almost eleven before I had them written up, then Mr. Charton drove me to Springfield

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to get them postmarked before midnight.

I had sent in five thousand seven hundred and eighty-two slogans. I doubt if Centerville was ever so scrubbed.

The results were announced on the Fourth of July. I chewed my nails to the elbows in those nine weeks. Oh, other things happened. I graduated and Dad and Mother gave me a watch and we paraded past Mr. Hanley and got our diplomas. It felt good, even though what Dad had persuaded me to learn beat what I learned at dear old Center six ways from zero. Before that was Sneak Day and Class Honeymoon and Senior Prom and the Class Play and the Junior-Senior Picnic and all the things they do to keep the animals quiet. Mr. Charton let me off early if I asked, but I didn't ask often as my mind wasn't on it and I wasn't going steady anyhow. I had been earlier in the year, but she—Elaine McMurty—wanted to talk boys and clothes and I wanted to talk space and engineering so she put me back into circulation.

After graduation I worked for Mr. Charton full time. I still didn't know how I was going to college. I didn't think about it; I just dished sundaes and held my breath until the Fourth of July.

It was to be on television at eight P.M. We had a TV—a black-and-white flat-image job — but it hadn't been turned on in months; after I built it I lost interest. I dug it out, set it up in the living room and tested the picture. I killed a couple of hours adjusting it, then spent the rest of the day chewing nails. I couldn't eat dinner. By seven thirty I was in front of it, fiddling with my file cards. Dad came in, looked sharply at me, and said, "Take a grip on yourself, Kip. Let me remind you again that the chances are against you."

I gulped. "I know, Dad."

"Furthermore, in the long run it won't matter. A man almost always gets what he wants badly enough. I am sure you will get to the Moon some day, one way or another."

"Yes, sir. I just wish they would get it over with."

"They will. Coming, Emma?"

"Right away, dearest," Mother called back. She came in, patted my hand, and sat down.

Dad settled back. "Reminds me of election nights."

Mother said, "I'm glad we're through with *that*!"

"Oh, come now, sweetheart, you enjoyed every campaign."

Mother sniffed.

The comics went back where comics go, cigarettes did a can-can, then dived into their packs while a soothing voice assured us that carcinogenous factors were unknown in Coronets, the safe,

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Safe, SAFE smoke with the true tobacco flavor. The program cut to the local station; we were treated to a thrilling view of Center Lumber & Hardware and I started pulling hairs out of the back of my hand.

The screen filled with soap bubbles; a quartet sang that this was the Skyway Hour, as if we didn't know. Then the screen went blank and sound cut off and I swallowed my stomach.

The screen lighted up with: NETWORK DIFFICULTY — DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SETS.

I yelped, "Oh, they can't do that! They can't!"

Dad said, "Stop it, Clifford."

I shut up. Mother said, "Now, dearest, he's just a boy."

Dad said, "He is not a boy; he is a man. Kip, how do you expect to face a firing squad calmly if this upsets you?"

I mumbled; he said "Speak up." I said I hadn't really planned on facing one.

"You may need to, some day. This is good practice. Try the Springfield channel; you may get a skip image."

I tried, but all I got was snow and the sound was like two cats in a sack. I jumped back to our local station.

"—for General Bryce Gilmore, United States Air Force, our guest tonight, who will explain to us, later in this program, some hitherto unreleased pictures of Federation Lunar Base and the infant Luna City, the fastest growing little city on the Moon. Immediately after announcing the winners we will attempt a television linkage with Lunar Base, through the cooperation of the Space Corps of the—"

I took a deep breath and tried to slow my heart beat, the way you steady down for a free throw in a tie game. The gabble dragged on while celebrities were introduced, the contest rules were explained, an improbably sweet young couple explained to each other why they always used Skyway Soap. My own sales talks were better.

At last they got to it. Eight girls paraded out; each held a big card over her head. The M.C. said in an awe-struck voice: *"And now . . . and* NOW*—the winning Skyway slogan for the . . . FREE TRIP TO THE MOON!"*

I couldn't breathe.

The girls sang, *"I like Skyway Soap because—"* and went on, each turning her card as a word reached her: *"—it . . . is . . . as . . . pure . . . as . . . the . . . sky . . . itself!"*

I was fumbling cards. I thought I recognized it but couldn't be sure—not after more than five thousand slogans. Then I found it —and checked the cards the girls were holding.

"Dad! Mother! I've won, I've won!"

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III

"Hold it, Kip!" Dad snapped. "Stop it."

Mother said, "Oh, *dear*!"

I heard the M.C. saying, "*—present the lucky winner, Mrs. Xenia Donahue, of Great Falls, Montana . . . Mrs.* DONAHUE!"

To a fanfare a little dumpy woman teetered out. I read the cards again. They still matched the one in my hand. I said, "Dad, what happened? That's *my* slogan."

"You didn't listen."

"They've cheated me!"

"Be quiet and listen."

"*—as we explained earlier, in the event of duplicate entries, priority goes to the one postmarked first. Any remaining tie is settled by time of arrival at the contest office. Our winning slogan was submitted by eleven contestants. To them go the first eleven prizes. Tonight we have with us the six top winners—for the trip to the Moon, the weekend in a satellite space station, the jet flight around the world, the flight to Antarctica, the—*"

"Beaten by a postmark. A *postmark*!"

"*—sorry we can't have every one of the winners with us tonight. To the rest this comes as a surprise.*" The M.C. looked at his watch. "*Right this minute, in a thousand homes across the land . . . right this* second—*there is a lucky knock on a lucky door of some loyal friend of Skyway—*"

There was a knock on *our* door.

I fell over my feet. Dad answered. There were three men, an enormous crate, and a Western Union messenger singing about Skyway Soap. Somebody said, "Is this where Clifford Russell lives?"

Dad said, "Yes."

"Will you sign for this?"

"What is it?"

"It just says 'This Side Up.' Where do you want it?"

Dad passed the receipt to me and I signed, somehow. Dad said, "Will you put it in the living room, please?"

They did and left and I got a hammer and sidecutters. It looked like a coffin and I could have used one.

I got the top off. A lot of packing got all over Mother's rugs. At last we were down to it.

It was a space suit.

Not much, as space suits go these days. It was an obsolete model that Skyway Soap had bought as surplus material—the tenth-to-hundredth prizes were all space units. But it was a real one, made by Goodyear, with air-conditioning by York and auxiliary equipment by General Electric. Its instruction manual and maintenance-and-service log were with it and it had racked up more than eight hundred hours in rigging the second satellite station.

I felt better. This was no phony,

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this was no toy. It had been out in space, even if I had not. But I would!—someday. I'd learn to use it and some day I'd wear it on the naked face of the Moon.

Dad said, "Maybe we'd better carry this to your workshop. Eh, Kip?"

Mother said, "There's no rush, dearest. Don't you want to try it on, Clifford?"

I certainly did. Dad and I compromised by toting the crate and packing out to the barn. When we came back, a reporter from the *Clarion* was there with a photographer – the paper had known I was a winner before I did, which didn't seem right.

They wanted pictures and I didn't mind.

I had an awful time getting into it—dressing in an upper berth is a cinch by comparison. The photographer said, "Just a minute, kid. I've seen 'em do it at Wright Field. Mind some advice?"

"Uh? No. I mean, 'Yes, tell me.'"

"You slide in like an Eskimo climbing into a kayak. Then wiggle your right arm in—"

It was fairly easy that way, opening front gaskets wide and sitting down in it, though I almost dislocated a shoulder. There were straps to adjust for size but we didn't bother; he stuffed me into it, zippered the gaskets, helped me to my feet and shut the helmet.

It didn't have air bottles and I had to live on the air inside while he got three shots. By then I knew that the suit had seen service; it smelled like dirty socks. I was glad to get the helmet off.

Just the same, it made me feel good to wear it. Like a spacer.

They left and presently we went to bed, leaving the suit in the living room.

About midnight I catfooted down and tried it on again.

The next morning I moved it out to my shop before I went to work. Mr. Charton was diplomatic; he just said he'd like to see my space suit when I had time. Everybody knew about it—my picture was on the front page of the *Clarion* along with the Pikes Peak Hill Climb and the holiday fatalities. The story had been played for laughs, but I didn't mind. I had never really *believed* I would win—and I had an honest-to-goodness space suit, which was more than my classmates had.

That afternoon Dad brought me a special delivery letter from Skyway Soap. It enclosed a property title to one suit, pressure, serial number so-and-so, ex-USAF. The letter started with congratulations and thanks but the last paragraphs meant something:

Skyway Soap realizes that your prize may not be of immediate use to you. Therefore, as mentioned in paragraph 4(a) of the rules Skyway offers to redeem it

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for a cash premium of five hundred dollars ($500.00). To avail yourself of this privilege you should return the pressure suit via express collect to Goodyear Corporation (Special Appliances Division, attn: Salvage*), Akron, Ohio, on or before September 15th.*

Skyway Soap hopes that you have enjoyed our Grand Contest as much as we have enjoyed having you and hopes that you will retain your prize long enough to appear with it on your local television station in a special Skyway Jubilee program. A fee of fifty dollars ($50.00) will be paid for this appearance. Your station manager will be in touch with you. We hope that you will be our guest.

All good wishes from Skyway, the Soap as Pure as the Sky Itself.

I handed it to Dad. He read it and handed it back.

I said, "I suppose I should."

He said, "I see no harm. Television leaves no external scars."

"Oh, that. Sure, it's easy money. But I meant I really ought to sell the suit back to them." I should have felt happy since I needed money, where I needed a space suit the way a pig needs a pipe organ. But I didn't, even though I had never had five hundred dollars in my life.

"Son, any statement that starts 'I really ought to—' is suspect. It means you haven't analyzed your motives."

"But five hundred dollars is tuition for a semester, almost."

"Which has nothing to do with the case. Find out what you want to do, then do it. Never talk yourself into doing something you don't want. Think it over." He said goodby and left.

I decided it was foolish to burn my bridges before I crossed them. The space suit was mine until the middle of September even if I did the sensible thing—by then I might be tired of it.

But I didn't get tired of it; a space suit is a marvelous piece of machinery—a little space station with everything miniaturized. Mine was a chrome-plated helmet and shoulder yoke which merged into a body of silicone, asbestos, and glass-fiber cloth. This hide was stiff except at the joints. They were the same rugged material but were "constant volume": when you bent a knee a bellows arrangement increased the volume over the kneecap as much as the space back of the knee was squeezed. Without this a man wouldn't be able to move; the pressure inside, which can add up to several tons, would hold him rigid as a statue. These volume compensators were covered with dural armor; even the finger joints had little dural plates over the knuckles.

It had a heavy glass-fiber belt with clips for tools, and there were the straps to adjust for

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height and weight. There was a back pack, now empty, for air bottles, and zippered pockets inside and out, for batteries and such.

The helmet swung back, taking a bib out of the yoke with it, and the front opened with two gasketed zippers; this left a door you could wiggle into. With helmet clamped and zippers closed it was impossible to open the suit with pressure inside.

Switches were mounted on the shoulder yoke and on the helmet; the helmet was monstrous. It contained a drinking tank, pill dispensers six on each side, a chin plate on the right to switch radio from "receive" to "send," another on the left to increase or decrease flow of air, an automatic polarizer for the face lens, microphone and earphones, space for radio circuits in a bulge back of the head, and an instrument board arched over the head. The instrument dials read backwards because they were reflected in an inside mirror in front of the wearer's forehead at an effective fourteen inches from the eyes.

Above the lens or window there were twin headlights. On top were two antennas, a spike for broadcast and a horn that squirted microwaves like a gun—you aimed it by facing the receiving station. The horn antenna was armored except its open end.

This sounds as crowded as a lady's purse but everything was beautifully compact; your head didn't touch anything when you looked out the lens. But you could tip your head back and see reflected instruments, or tilt it down and turn it to work chin controls, or simply turn your neck for water nipple or pills. In all remaining space sponge-rubber padding kept you from banging your head no matter what.

My suit was like a fine car, its helmet like a Swiss watch.

But its air bottles were missing, so was radio gear except built-in antennas, radar beacon and emergency radar target were gone, pockets inside and out were empty, and there were no tools on the belt. The manual told what it ought to have—it was like a stripped car.

I decided I just had to make it work right.

First I swabbed it out with Clorox to kill the locker-room odor. Then I got to work on the air system.

It's a good thing they included that manual; most of what I thought I knew about space suits was wrong.

A man uses around three pounds of oxygen a day—pounds mass, not pounds per square inch. You'd think a man could carry oxygen for a month, especially out in space where mass has no weight, or on the Moon where three

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pounds weigh only half a pound. Well, that's OK for space stations or ships or frogmen; they run air through soda lime to take out carbon dioxide, and breathe it again. But not space suits.

Even today people talk about "the bitter cold of outer space" —but space is vacuum and if vacuum were cold, how could a Thermos jug keep coffee hot?

Three-fourths of your food turns into heat—a lot of heat, enough each day to melt 50 pounds of ice and more. Sounds preposterous, doesn't it? But when you have a roaring fire in the furnace, you are *cooling* your body; even in the winter you keep a room about thirty degrees cooler than your body. When you turn up a furnace's thermostat, you are picking a more comfortable rate for cooling. Your body makes so much heat you have to get rid of it, exactly as you have to cool a car's engine.

Of course, if you do it too fast, say in a sub-zero wind, you can freeze—but the usual problem in a space suit is to keep from being boiled like a lobster. You've got vacuum all around you and it's *hard* to get rid of heat.

Some radiates away but not enough, and if you are in sunlight, you pick up still more—this is why spaceships are polished like mirrors.

So what can you do?

Well, you can't carry 50-pound blocks of ice. You get rid of heat the way you do on Earth, by convection and evaporation—you keep air moving over you to evaporate sweat and cool you off. Oh, they'll learn to build space suits that recycle like a spaceship but today the practical way is to let used air escape from the suit, flushing away sweat and carbon dioxide and excess heat—while wasting most of the oxygen.

There are other problems. The fifteen pounds per square inch around you includes three pounds of oxygen pressure. Your lungs can get along on less than half that, but only an Indian from the high Andes is likely to be comfortable on less than two pounds oxygen pressure. Nine-tenths of a pound is the limit. Any less won't force oxygen into blood—which is about like the top of Mount Everest.

Most people suffer from hypoxia (oxygen shortage) long before this, so better use two p.s.i. of oxygen. Mix an inert gas with it, because pure oxygen can cause a sore throat or make you drunk or even cause terrible cramps. Don't use nitrogen (which you've breathed all your life) because it will bubble in your blood if pressure drops and cripple you with "bends." Use helium, which doesn't. It gives you a squeaky voice, but who cares?

You can die from oxygen shortage, be poisoned by too much oxy-

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gen, be crippled by nitrogen, drown in or be acid-poisoned by carbon dioxide, or dehydrate and run a killing fever. When I finished reading that manual I didn't see how anybody could stay alive anywhere, much less in a space suit.

But a suit was in front of me that had protected a man for hundreds of hours in empty space.

Here is how you beat those dangers. Carry steel bottles on your back; they hold "air" (oxygen and helium) at 150 atmospheres, over 2000 pounds per square inch; you draw from them through a reduction valve down to 150 p.s.i. and through still another reduction valve, a "demand" type which keeps pressure in your helmet at three to five pounds per square inch—two pounds of it oxygen. Put a silicone-rubber collar around your neck and put tiny holes in it, so that the pressure in the body of your suit is less, the air movement still faster; then evaporation and cooling will be increased while the effort of bending is decreased. Add exhaust valves, one at each wrist and ankle—these have to pass water as well as gas because you may be ankle-deep in sweat.

The bottles are big and clumsy, weighing around 60 pounds apiece and each holds only about five mass pounds of air even at that enormous pressure; instead of a month's supply you will have only a few hours—my suit was rated at eight hours for the bottles it used to have. But you will be OK for those hours—if everything works right. You can stretch the time, for you don't die from overheating very fast and can stand too much carbon dioxide even longer—but let your oxygen run out and you die in about seven minutes. Which gets us back where we started: it takes oxygen to stay alive.

To make darn sure that you're getting enough (your nose can't tell) you clip a little photoelectric cell to your ear and let it see the color of your blood; the redness of blood measures the oxygen it carries. Hook this to a galvanometer. If its needle gets into the danger zone, start saying your prayers.

I went to Springfield on my day off, taking the suit's hose fittings, and shopped. I picked up, second hand, two 30-inch steel bottles from a welding shop—and got myself disliked by insisting on a pressure test. I took them home on the bus, stopped at Pring's Garage and arranged to buy air at 50 atmospheres. Higher pressures, or oxygen or helium, I could get from the Springfield airport, but I didn't need them yet.

When I got home I closed the suit, empty, and pumped it with a bicycle pump to two atmospheres absolute, or one relative, which

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gave me a test load of almost four to one compared with space conditions. Then I tackled the bottles. They needed to be mirror-bright, since you can't afford to let them pick up heat from the Sun. I stripped and scraped and wire-brushed, and buffed and polished, preparatory to nickel-plating.

Next morning, Oscar the Mechanical Man was limp as a pair of long johns.

Getting that old suit not just airtight but helium-tight was the worst headache. Air isn't bad but the helium molecule is so small and agile that it migrates right through ordinary rubber—and I wanted this job to be *right*, not just good enough to perform at home but OK for space. The gaskets were shot and there were slow leaks almost impossible to find.

I had to get new silicone-rubber gaskets and patching compound and tissue from Goodyear; small-town hardware stores don't handle such things. I wrote a letter explaining what I wanted and why—and they didn't even charge me. They sent me some mimeographed sheets elaborating on the manual.

It still wasn't easy. But there came a day when I pumped Oscar full of pure helium at two atmospheres absolute.

A week later he was still tight as a six-ply tire.

That day I wore Oscar as a self-contained environment. I had already worn him many hours without the helmet, working around the shop, handling tools while hampered by his gauntlets, getting height and size adjustments right. It was like breaking in new ice skates and after a while I was hardly aware I had it on—once I came to supper in it. Dad said nothing and Mother has the social restraint of an ambassador; I discovered my mistake when I picked up my napkin.

Now I wasted helium to the air, mounted bottles charged with air, and suited up. Then I clamped the helmet and dogged the safety catches.

Air sighed softly into the helmet, its flow through the demand valve regulated by the rise and fall of my chest—I could reset it to speed up or slow down by the chin control. I did so, watching the gauge in the mirror and letting it mount until I had twenty pounds absolute inside. That gave me five pounds more than the pressure around me, which was as near as I could come to space conditions without being in space.

I could feel the suit swell and the joints no longer felt loose and easy. I balanced the cycle at five pounds differential and tried to move.

—and almost fell over. I had to grab the workbench.

Suited up, with bottles on my back, I weighed more than twice

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what I do stripped. Besides that, although the joints were constant-volume, the suit didn't work as freely under pressure. Dress yourself in heavy fishing waders, put on an overcoat and boxing gloves and a bucket over your head, then have somebody strap two sacks of cement across your shoulders and you will know what a space suit feels like under one gravity.

But ten minutes later I was handling myself fairly well and in half an hour I felt as if I had worn one all my life. The distributed weight wasn't too great (and I knew it wouldn't amount to much on the Moon). The joints were just a case of getting used to more effort. I had had more trouble learning to swim.

It was a blistering day; I went outside and looked at the Sun. The polarizer cut the glare and I was able to look at it. I looked away; polarizing eased off and I could see around me.

I stayed cool. The air, cooled by semi-adiabatic expansion (*it said* in the manual), cooled my head and flowed on through the suit, washing away body heat and used air through the exhaust valves. The manual said that heating elements rarely cut in; since the usual problem was to get rid of heat; I decided to get dry ice and force a test of thermostat and heater.

I tried everything I could think of. A creek runs back of our place and beyond is a pasture. I sloshed through the stream, lost my footing and fell—the worst trouble was that I could never see where I was putting my feet. Once I was down I lay there a while, half floating but mostly covered. I didn't get wet, I didn't get hot, I didn't get cold, and my breathing was as easy as ever even though water shimmered over my helmet.

I scrambled heavily up the bank and fell again, striking my helmet against a rock. No damage, Oscar was built to take it. I pulled my knees under me, got up, and crossed the pasture, stumbling on rough ground but not falling. There was a haystack there and I dug into it until I was buried.

Cool fresh air . . . no trouble, no sweat.

After three hours I took it off. The suit had relief arrangements like any pilot's outfit but I hadn't rigged it yet, so I had to come out before my air was gone. When I hung it in the rack I had built, I patted the shoulder yoke. "Oscar, you're all right," I told it. "You and I are partners. We're going places."

I would have sneered at five thousand dollars for Oscar.

While Oscar was taking his pressure tests I worked on his electrical and electronic gear. I didn't bother with a radar target nor beacon; the first is childishly

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simple, the second is fiendishly expensive. But I did want radio for the space-operations band of the spectrum—the antennas suited only those wavelengths. I could have built an ordinary walkie-talkie and hung it outside—but I would have been kidding myself with a wrong frequency and gear that might not stand vacuum. Changes in pressure and temperature and humidity do funny things to electronic circuits; that is why the radio was housed inside the helmet.

The manual gave circuit diagrams, so I got busy. The audio and modulating circuits were no problem, just battery-operated transistor circuitry which I could make plenty small enough. But the microwave part . . .

It was a two-headed calf, each with transmitter and receiver—one centimeter wavelength for the horn and three octaves lower at eight centimeters for the spike in a harmonic relationship, one crystal controlling both. This gave more signal on broadcast and better aiming when squirting out the horn and also meant that only part of the rig had to be switched in changing antennas. The output of a variable-frequency oscillator was added to the crystal frequency in tuning the receiver. The circuitry was simple—on paper.

But microwave circuitry is never easy; it takes precision machining and a slip of a tool can foul up the impedance and ruin a mathematically calculated resonance.

Well, I tried. Synthetic precision crystals are cheap from surplus houses and some transistors and other components I could vandalize from my own gear. And I made it work, after the fussiest pray-and-try-again I have ever done. But the consarned thing simply would *not* fit into the helmet.

Call it a moral victory—I've never done better work.

I finally bought one, precision made and embedded in plastic, from the same firm that sold me the crystal. Like the suit it was made for, it was obsolete and I paid a price so low that I merely screamed. By then I would have mortgaged my soul—I wanted that suit to *work*.

The only thing that complicated the rest of the electrical gear was that everything had to be either "fail-safe" or "no-fail"; a man in a space suit can't pull into the next garage if something goes wrong—the stuff *has* to keep on working or he becomes a vital statistic. That was why the helmet had twin headlights; the second cut in if the first failed—even the peanut lights for the dials over my head were twins. I didn't take short cuts; every duplicate circuit I kept duplicate and tested to make sure that automatic changeover always worked.

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Mr. Charton insisted on filling the manual's list on those items a drugstore stocks: maltose and dextrose and amino tablets, vitamins, dexedrine, dramamine, aspirin, antibiotics, antihistamines, codeine, almost any pill a man can take to help him past a hump that might kill him. He got Doc Kennedy to write prescriptions so that I could stock Oscar without breaking laws.

When I got through Oscar was in as good shape as he had ever been in Satellite Two. It had been more fun than the time I helped Jake Bixby turn his heap into a hotrod.

But summer was ending and it was time I pulled out of my daydream. I still did not know where I was going to school, or how—or if. I had saved money but it wasn't nearly enough. I had spent a little on postage and soap wrappers but I got that back and more by one fifteen-minute appearance on television and I hadn't spent a dime on girls since March—too busy. Oscar cost surprisingly little; repairing Oscar had been mostly sweat and screwdriver. Seven dollars out of every ten I had earned was sitting in the money basket.

But it wasn't enough.

I realized glumly that I was going to have to sell Oscar to get through the first semester. But how would I get through the rest of the year? Joe Valiant the All-American boy always shows up on the campus with fifty cents and a heart of gold, then in the last chapter is tapped for Skull-and-Bones and has money in the bank. But I wasn't Joe Valiant, not by eight decimal places. Did it make sense to start if I was going to have to drop out about Christmas? Wouldn't it be smarter to stay out a year and get acquainted with a pick and shovel?

Did I have a choice? The only school I was sure of was State U. —and there was a row about professors being fired and talk that State U. might lose its accredited standing. Wouldn't it be comical to spend years slaving for a degree and then have it be worthless because your school wasn't recognized?

State U. wasn't better than a "B" school in engineering even before this fracas.

Rensselaer and CalTech turned me down the same day—one with a printed form, the other with a polite letter saying it was impossible to accept all qualified applicants.

Little things were getting my goat, too. The only virtue of that television show was the fifty bucks. A person looks foolish wearing a space suit in a television studio and our announcer milked it for laughs, rapping the helmet and asking me if I was still in there. Very funny. He asked me what I wanted with a space suit

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and when I tried to answer he switched off the mike in my suit and patched in a tape with nonsense about space pirates and flying saucers. Half the people in town thought it was my voice.

It wouldn't have been hard to live down if Ace Quiggle hadn't turned up. He had been missing all summer, in jail maybe, but the day after the show he took a seat at the fountain, stared at me and said in a loud whisper, "Say, ain't you the famous space pirate and television star?"

I said, "What'll you have, Ace?"

"Gosh! Could I have your autograph? I ain't never seen a real live space pirate before!"

"Give me your order, Ace. Or let someone else use that stool."

"A choc malt, Commodore—and leave out the soap."

Ace's "wit" went on every time he showed up. It was a dreadfully hot summer and easy to get tempery. The Friday before Labor Day weekend the store's cooling system went sour, we couldn't get a repairman and I spent three bad hours fixing it, ruining my second-best pants and getting myself reeking. I was back at the fountain and wishing I could go home for a bath when Ace swaggered in, greeted me loudly with "Why, if it isn't Commander Comet, the Scourge of the Spaceways! Where's your blaster gun, Commander? Ain't you afraid the Galactic Emperor will make you stay in after school for running around bare-nekkid? Yuk yuk yukkity yuk!"

A couple of girls at the fountain giggled.

"Lay off, Ace," I said wearily. "It's a hot day."

"That why you're not wearing your rubber underwear?" The girls giggled again.

Ace smirked. He went on: "Junior, seein' you got that clown suit, why don't you put it to work? Run an ad in the *Clarion*: 'Have Space Suit—Will Travel.' Yukkity yuk! Or you could hire out as a scarecrow."

The girls snickered. I counted ten, then again in Spanish, and in Latin, and said tensely, "Ace, just tell me what you'll have."

"My usual. And snap it up—I've got a date on Mars."

Mr. Charton came out from behind his counter, sat down and asked me to mix him a lime cooler, so I served him first. It stopped the flow of wit and probably saved Ace's life.

The boss and I were alone shortly after. He said quietly, "Kip, a reverence for life does not require a man to respect Nature's obvious mistakes."

"Sir?"

"You need not serve Quiggle again. I don't want his trade."

"Oh, I don't mind. He's harmless."

"I wonder how harmless such people are? To what extent civili-

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zation is retarded by the laughing jackasses, the empty-minded belittlers? Go home; you'll want to make an early start tomorrow."

I had been invited to the Lake of the Forest for the long Labor Day weekend by Jake Bixby's parents. I wanted to go, not only to get away from the heat but also to chew things over with Jake. But I answered, "Shucks, Mr. Charton, I ought not to leave you stuck."

"The town will be deserted over the holiday; I may not open the fountain. Enjoy yourself. This summer has worn you a bit fine, Kip."

I let myself be persuaded but I stayed until closing and swept up. Then I walked home, doing some hard thinking.

The party was over and it was time to put away my toys. Even the village half-wit knew that I had no sensible excuse to have a space suit. Not that I cared what Ace thought . . . but I did have no use for it—and I needed money. Even if Stanford and M.I.T. and Carnegie and the rest turned me down, I was going to start this semester. State U. wasn't the best—but neither was I and I had learned that more depended on the student than on the school.

Mother had gone to bed and Dad was reading. I said hello and went to the barn, intending to strip my gear off Oscar, pack him into his case, address it, and in the morning phone the express office to pick it up. He'd be gone before I was back from the Lake of the Forest. Quick and clean.

He was hanging on his rack and it seemed to me that he grinned hello. Nonsense, of course. I went over and patted his shoulder: "Well, old fellow, you've been a real chum and it's been nice knowing you. See you on the Moon—I hope."

But Oscar wasn't going to the Moon. Oscar was going to Akron, Ohio, to "Salvage." They were going to unscrew parts they could use and throw the rest of him on the junk pile.

My mouth felt dry.

("It's OK, pal," Oscar answered.)

See that? Out of my silly head! Oscar didn't really speak; I had let my imagination run wild too long. So I quit patting him, hauled the crate out and took a wrench from his belt to remove the gas bottles.

I stopped.

Both bottles were charged, one with oxygen, one with oxy-helium. I had wasted money to do so because I wanted, just once, to try a spaceman's mix.

The batteries were fresh and power packs were charged.

"Oscar," I said softly, "we're going to take a last walk together. OK?"

("Swell!")

I made it a dress rehearsal:

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water in the drinking tank, pill dispensers loaded, first-aid kit inside, vacuum-proof duplicate (I hoped it was vacuum-proof) in an outside pocket. All tools on belt, all lanyards tied so that tools wouldn't float away in free fall. Everything.

Then I heated up a circuit that the FCC would have squelched had they noticed, a radio link I had salvaged out of my effort to build a radio for Oscar, and had modified as a test rig for Oscar's ears and to let me check the aiming of the directional antenna. It was hooked in with an echo circuit that would answer back if I called it—a thing I had breadboarded out of an old Webcor wire recorder, vintage 1950.

Then I climbed into Oscar and buttoned up. "Tight?"

("Tight!")

I glanced at the reflected dials, noticed the blood-color reading, reduced pressure until Oscar almost collapsed. At nearly sea-level pressure I was in no danger from hypoxia; the trick was to avoid too much oxygen.

We started to leave when I remembered something. "Just a second, Oscar." I wrote a note to my folks, telling them that I was going to get up early and catch the first bus to the lake. I could write while suited up now, I could even thread a needle. I stuck the note under the kitchen door.

Then we crossed the creek into the pasture. I didn't stumble in wading; I was used to Oscar now, sure-footed as a goat.

Out in the field I keyed my talkie and said, "Junebug, calling Peewee. Come in, Peewee."

Seconds later my recorded voice came back: "'Junebug, calling Peewee. Come in, Peewee.'"

I shifted to the horn antenna and tried again. It wasn't easy to aim in the dark but it was OK. Then I shifted back to spike antenna and went on calling Peewee while moving across the pasture and pretending that I was on Venus and had to stay in touch with base because it was unknown terrain and unbreathable atmosphere. Everything worked perfectly and if it had been Venus, I would have been all right.

Two lights moved across the southern sky, planes I thought, or maybe helis. Just the sort of thing yokels like to report as "flying saucers." I watched them, then moved behind a little rise that would tend to spoil reception and called Peewee. Peewee answered and I shut up; it gets dull talking to an idiot circuit which can only echo what you say to it.

Then I heard: "Peewee to Junebug! Answer!"

I thought I had been monitored and was in trouble—then decided that some ham had picked me up. "Junebug here. I read you. Who are you?"

The test rig echoed my words.

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Then the new voice shrilled, "Peewee here! Home me in!"

This was silly. But I found myself saying, "Junebug to Peewee, shift to directional frequency at one centimeter—and keep talking, keep talking!" I shifted to the horn antenna.

"Junebug, I read you. Fix me. One, two three, four, five, six, seven—"

"You're due south of me, up about forty degrees. Who are you?"

It must be one of those lights. It had to be.

But I didn't have time to figure it out. A spaceship almost landed on me.

IV

I said "spaceship," not "rocketship." It made no noise but a whoosh and there weren't any flaming jets—it seemed to move by clean living and righteous thoughts.

I was too busy keeping from being squashed to worry about details. A space suit in one gravity is no track suit; it's a good thing I had practiced. The ship sat down where I had just been, occupying more than its share of pasture, a big black shape.

The other one whooshed down, too, just as a door opened in the first. Light poured through the door; two figures spilled out and started to run. One moved like a cat; the other moved clumsily and slowly—handicapped by a space suit. S'help me, a person in a space suit does look silly. This one was less than five feet tall and looked like the Gingerbread Man.

A big trouble with a suit is your limited angle of vision. I was trying to watch both these two and did not see the second ship open. The first figure stopped, waiting for the one in the space suit to catch up, then suddenly collapsed—just a gasping sound, "Eee*ah*!"—and clunk.

You can tell the sound of pain. I ran to the spot at a lumbering dogtrot, leaned over and tried to see what was wrong, tilting my helmet bring the beam of my headlight onto the ground.

A bug-eyed monster—

That's not fair but it was my first thought. I couldn't believe it and would have pinched myself except that it isn't practical when suited up.

An unprejudiced mind (which mine wasn't) would have said that this monster was rather pretty. It was small, not more than half my size, and its curves were graceful, not as a girl is but more like a leopard, although it wasn't shaped like either one. I couldn't grasp its shape—I didn't have any pattern to fit it to; it wouldn't add up.

But I could see that it was hurt. Its body was quivering like a frightened rabbit. It had enor-

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mous eyes, open but milky and featureless, as if nictitating membranes were across them. What appeared to be its mouth—

That's as far as I got. Something hit me in the spine, right between the gas bottles.

I woke up on a bare floor, staring at a ceiling. It took several moments to recall what had happened and then I shied away because it was so darn silly. I had been out for a walk in Oscar . . . and then a space ship had landed . . . and a bug-eyed—

I sat up suddenly as I realized that Oscar was gone. A light cheerful voice said, "Hi, there!"

I snapped my head around. A kid about ten years old was seated on the floor, leaning against a wall. He—I corrected myself. Boys don't usually clutch rag dolls. This kid was the age when the difference doesn't show much and was dressed in shirt, shorts and dirty tennis shoes, and had short hair, so I didn't have much to go on but the rag dolly.

"Hi, yourself," I answered. "What are we doing here?"

"I'm surviving. I don't know about you."

"Huh?"

"Surviving. Pushing my breath in and out. Conserving my strength. There's nothing else to do at the moment; they've got us locked in."

I looked around. The room was about ten feet across, four-sided but wedge shaped, and nothing in it but us. I couldn't see a door; if we weren't locked in, we might as well be. "Who locked us in?"

"Them. Space pirates. And *him*."

"Space pirates? Don't be silly!"

The kid shrugged. "Just my name for them. But better not think they're silly if you want to keep on surviving. Are you 'Junebug'?"

"Huh? You sound like a junebug yourself. Space pirates, my aunt!" I was worried and very confused and this nonsense didn't help. Where was Oscar? And where was *I*?

"No, no, not *a* junebug but 'Junebug'—a radio call. You see, I'm Peewee."

I said to myself, Kip old pal, walk slowly to the nearest hospital and give yourself up. When a radio rig you wired yourself starts looking like a skinny little girl with a rag doll, you've flipped. It's going to be wet packs and tranquilizers and no excitement for you—you've blown every fuse. "You're 'Peewee'?"

"That's what I'm called—I'm relaxed about it. You see, I heard 'Junebug, calling Peewee,' and decided that Daddy had found out about the spot I was in and had alerted people to help me land. But if you aren't 'Junebug,' you wouldn't know about that. Who are you?"

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"Wait a minute, I *am* Junebug. I mean I was using that call. But I'm Clifford Russell—'Kip' they call me."

"How do you do, Kip?" she said politely.

"And howdy to you, Peewee. Uh, are you a boy or a girl?"

Peewee looked disgusted. "I'll make you regret that remark. I realize I am undersized for my age but I'm actually eleven, going on twelve. There's no need to be rude. In another five years I expect to be quite a dish—you'll probably beg me for every dance."

At the moment I would as soon have danced with a kitchen stool, but I had things on my mind and didn't want a useless argument. "Sorry, Peewee. I'm still groggy. You mean you were in that first ship?"

Again she looked miffed. "I was piloting it."

Sedation every night and a long course of psychoanalysis. At *my* age. "You were . . . piloting?"

"You surely don't think the Mother Thing could? She wouldn't fit their controls. She curled up beside me and coached. But if you think it's easy, when you've never piloted anything but a Cessna with your Daddy at your elbow and never made *any* kind of landing, then think again. I did very well!—and your landing instructions weren't too specific. What have they done with the Mother Thing?"

"The what?"

"You don't know? Oh, dear!"

"Wait a minute, Peewee. Let's get on the same frequency. I'm Junebug all right and I homed you in—and if you think *that's* easy, to have a voice out of nowhere demand emergency landing instructions, you better think again, too. Anyhow, a ship landed and another ship landed right after it and a door opened in the first ship and a guy in a space suit jumped out—"

"That was I."

"—and something else jumped out—"

"The Mother Thing."

"Only she didn't get far. She gave a screech and flopped. I went to see what the trouble was and something hit me. The next thing I know you're saying, 'Hi, there.'" I wondered if I ought to tell her that the rest, including her, was likely a morphine dream because I was probably lying in a hospital with my spine in a cast.

Peewee nodded thoughtfully. "They must have blasted you at low power, or you wouldn't be here. Well, they caught you and they caught me, so they almost certainly caught her. Oh, dear! I do hope they didn't hurt her."

"She looked like she was dying."

"As if she were dying," Peewee corrected me. "Subjunctive. I rather doubt it; she's awfully hard to kill—and they wouldn't kill her except to keep her from escaping;

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after all, they need her alive."

"Why? And why do you call her 'the Mother Thing'?"

"One at a time, Kip. She's the Mother Thing because . . . well, because she *is*, that's all. You'll know, when you meet her. As to why they wouldn't kill her, it's because she's worth more as a hostage than as a corpse—the same reason they kept me alive. Although she's worth incredibly more than I am—they'd write me off without a blink if I became inconvenient. Or you. But since she was alive when you saw her, then it's logical that she's a prisoner again. Maybe right next door. That makes me feel *much* better."

It didn't make me feel better. "Yes, but where's *here*?"

Peewee glanced at a Mickey Mouse watch, frowned and said, "Almost half way to the Moon, I'd say."

"*What*?!"

"Of course I don't *know*. But it makes sense that they would go back to their nearest base; that's where the Mother Thing and I scrammed from."

"You're telling me we're in that ship?"

"Either the one I swiped or the other one. Where did you think you were, Kip? Where else *could* you be?"

"A mental hospital."

She looked big-eyed and then grinned. "Why, Kip, surely your grip on reality is not that weak?"

"I'm not sure about anything. Space pirates—Mother Things—"

She frowned and bit her thumb. "I suppose it must be confusing. But trust your ears and eyes. My grip on reality is quite strong, I assure you—you see, I'm a genius." She made it a statement, not a boast, and somehow I was not inclined to doubt the claim, even though it came from a skinny-shanked kid with a rag doll in her arms.

But I didn't see how it was going to help.

Peewee went on: "'Space pirates' . . . mmm. Call them what you wish. Their actions are piratical and they operate in space—you name them. As for the Mother Thing . . . wait until you meet her."

"What's she doing in this hullaballoo?"

"Well, it's complicated. She had better explain it. She's a cop and she was after them—"

"A cop?"

"I'm afraid that is another semantic inadequacy. The Mother Thing knows what we mean by 'cop' and I think she finds the idea bewildering if not impossible. But what would you call a person who hunts down miscreants? A cop, no?"

"A cop, yes, I guess."

"So would I." She looked again at her watch. "But right now I think we had better hang on. We ought to be at half way point in

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a few minutes—and a skew-flip is disconcerting even if you are strapped down."

I had read about skew-flip turnovers, but only as a theoretical maneuver; I had never heard of a ship that could do one. If this was a ship. The floor felt as solid as concrete and as motionless. "I don't see anything to hang on to."

"Not much, I'm afraid. But if we sit down in the narrowest part and push against each other, I think we can brace enough not to slide around. But let's hurry; my watch must be slow."

We sat on the floor in the narrow part where the angled walls were about five feet apart. We faced each other and pushed our shoes against each other, bracing like an Alpinist inching his way up a rock chimney. My socks against her tennis shoes, rather, for my shoes were still on my workbench, so far as I knew. I wondered if they had simply dumped Oscar in the pasture and if Dad would find him?

"Push hard, Kip, and brace your hands against the deck."

I did so. "How do you know when they'll turn over, Peewee?"

"I haven't been unconscious—they just tripped me and carried me inside—so I know when we took off. If we assume that the Moon is their destination, as it probably is, and if we assume one gravity the whole jump—which can't be far off; my weight feels normal. Doesn't yours, Kip?"

I considered it. "I think so."

"Then it probably is, even though my own sense of weight may be distorted from being on the Moon. If those assumptions are correct, then it is almost exactly a three-and-a-half hour trip and"—Peewee looked at her watch—"E.T.A. should be nine thirty in the morning and turn-over at seven forty-five. Any moment now."

"Is it that late?" I looked at my watch. "Why, I've got a quarter of two."

"You're on your zone time. I'm on Moon time—Greenwich time, that is. Oh, oh! Here we go!"

The floor tilted, swerved, and swooped like a roller coaster, and my semicircular canals did a samba. Things steadied down as I pulled out of acute dizziness.

"You all right?" asked Peewee.

I managed to focus my eyes. "Uh, I think so. It felt like a one-and-a-half gainer into a dry pool."

"This pilot does it faster than I dared to. It doesn't really hurt, after your eyes uncross. But that settles it. We're headed for the Moon. We'll be there in an hour and three quarters."

I still couldn't believe it. "Peewee? What kind of a ship can gun at one gee all the way to the Moon? They began keeping it secret? And what were *you* doing on the Moon anyhow? And why were you stealing a ship?"

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She sighed and spoke to her doll. "He's a quiz kid, Madame Pompadour. Kip, how can I answer three questions at once? This is a flying saucer, and—"

"Flying saucer! Now I've heard everything."

"It's rude to interrupt. Call it anything you like; there's nothing official about the term. Actually it's shaped more like a loaf of pumpernickel, an oblate spheroid. That's a shape defined—"

"I know what an oblate spheroid is," I snapped. I was tired and upset from too many things, from a cranky air-conditioner that had ruined a good pair of pants to being knocked out while on an errand of mercy. Not to mention Ace Quiggle. I was beginning to think that little girls who were geniuses ought to have the grace not to show it.

"No need to be brisk," she said reprovingly. "I am aware that people have called everything from weather balloons to street lights 'flying saucers.' But it is my considered opinion, by Occam's Razor, that—"

"Whose razor?"

"Occam's. Least hypothesis. Don't you know anything about logic?"

"Not much."

"Well . . . I suspect that about every five-hundredth 'saucer sighting' was a ship like this. It adds up. As for what I was doing on the Moon—" She stopped and grinned at me. "I'm a pest."

I didn't argue it.

"A long time ago when my Daddy was a boy, the Hayden Planetarium took reservations for trips to the Moon. It was just a publicity gag, like that silly soap contest recently, but Daddy got his name on the list. Now, years and years later, they are letting people go to the Moon—and sure enough, the Hayden people turned the list over to American Express, and American Express notified the applicants they could locate that they would be given preference."

"So your father took you to the Moon?"

"Oh, heavens, no! Daddy filled out that form when he was only a boy. Now he is just about the biggest man at the Institute for Advanced Study and hasn't time for such pleasures. And Mama wouldn't go if you paid her. So I said I would. Daddy said '*No!*' and Mama said '*Good gracious No!*' . . . and so I went. I can be an awful nuisance when I put my mind on it," she said proudly. "I have talent for it. Daddy says I'm an amoral little wretch."

"Uh, do you suppose he might be right?"

"Oh, I'm sure he *is*. He understands me, whereas Mama throws up her hands and says she can't cope. I was perfectly beastly and unbearable for two whole weeks and at last Daddy said 'For

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Blank's sake let her go!—maybe we'll collect her insurance!' So I did."

"Mmmmm . . . that still doesn't explain why you are here."

"Oh, that. I was poking around where I shouldn't, doing things they told us not to. I always get around; it's very educational. So they grabbed me. They hope to swap me for Daddy. I couldn't let that happen, so I had to escape."

I muttered, " 'The butler did it.' "

"What?"

"Your story has as many holes as the last chapter of most whodunits."

"Oh. But I assure you it is the simple—oh, oh! here we go again!"

All that happened was that the lighting changed from white to blue. There weren't any light fixtures; the whole ceiling glowed. We were still sprawled on the floor. I started to get up—and found I couldn't.

I felt as if I had just finished a cross-country race, too weak to do anything but breathe. Blue light can't do that; it's merely wavelengths 4300 to 5100 angstroms and sunlight is loaded with it. But whatever they used with the blue light made us as limp as wet string.

Peewee was struggling to tell me something. "If . . . they're coming for us . . . don't resist . . . and above all—"

The blue light changed to white. The narrow wall started to slide aside.

Peewee looked scared and made a great effort. "—above all . . . don't antagonize . . . *him*."

Two men came in, shoved Peewee aside, strapped my wrists and ankles and ran another strap around my middle, binding my arms. I started to come out of it—not like flipping a switch, as I still didn't have energy enough to lick a stamp. I wanted to bash their heads but I stood as much chance as a butterfly has of hefting a bar bell.

They carried me out. I started to protest. "Say, where are you guys taking me? What do you think you're doing? I'll have you arrested. I'll—"

"Shaddap," said one. He was a skinny runt, fifty or older, and looked as if he never smiled. The other was fat and younger, with a petulant babyish mouth and a dimple in his chin; he looked as if he could laugh if he weren't worried. He was worrying now.

"Tim, this can get us in trouble. We ought to space him—we ought to space both of 'em—and tell *him* it was an accident. We can say they got out and tried to escape through the lock. *He* won't know the dif—"

"Shaddap," answered Tim with no inflection. He added, "You want trouble with *him*? You want to chew space?"

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"But—"

"Shaddap."

They carried me around a curved corridor, into an inner room and dumped me on the floor.

I was face up but it took time to realize this must be the control room. It didn't look like anything any human would design as a control room, which wasn't surprising as no human had. Then I saw *him.*

Peewee needn't have warned me; I didn't want to antagonize *him.*

The little guy was tough and dangerous, the fat guy was mean and murderous; they were cherubs compared with *him.* If I had had my strength I would have fought those two any way they liked; I don't think I'm too afraid of any human as long as the odds aren't impossible.

But not *him.*

He wasn't human but that wasn't what hurt. Elephants aren't human but they are very nice people. He was built more like a human than an elephant is but that was no help—I mean he stood erect and had feet at one end and a head at the other. *He* was no more than five feet tall but that didn't help either; he dominated us the way a man dominates a horse. The torso part was as long as mine; his shortness came from very squat legs, with feet (I guess you would call them feet) which bulged out, almost disc-like. They made squashy, sucking sounds when he moved. When he stood still a tail, or third leg, extruded and turned him into a tripod—he didn't need to sit down and I doubt if he could.

Short legs did not make him slow. His movements were blurringly fast, like a striking snake. Does this mean a better nervous system and more efficient muscles? Or a native planet with higher gravity?

His arms looked like snakes—they had more joints than ours. He had two sets, one pair where his waist should have been and another set under his head. No shoulders. I couldn't count his fingers, or digit tendrils; they never held still. He wasn't dressed except for a belt below and above the middle arms which carried whatever such a thing carries in place of money and keys. His skin was purplish brown and looked oily.

Whatever *he* was, he was *not* the same race as the Mother Thing.

He had a faint sweetish musky odor. Any crowded room smells worse on a hot day, but if I ever whiff that odor again, my skin will crawl and I'll be tongue-tied with fright.

I didn't take in these details instantly; at first all I could see was his face. A "face" is all I can call it. I haven't described it yet be-

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cause I'm afraid I'll get the snakes. But I will, so that if you ever see one, you'll shoot first, before your bones turn to jelly.

No nose. He was an oxygen breather but where the air went in and out I couldn't say—some of it through the mouth, for he could talk. The mouth was the second worst part of him; in place of jawbone and chin he had mandibles that opened sideways as well as down, gaping in three irregular sides. There were rows of tiny teeth but no tongue that I could see; instead the mouth was rimmed with cilia as long as angleworms. They never stopped squirming.

I said the mouth was "second worst"; he had eyes. They were big and bulging and protected by horny ridges, two on the front of his head, set wide apart.

They scanned. They scanned like radar, swinging up and down and back and forth. He never looked at you and yet was *always* looking at you.

When he turned around, I saw a third eye in back. I think he scanned his whole surroundings at all times, like a radar warning system.

What kind of brain can put together everything in all directions at once? I doubt if a human brain could, even if there were any way to feed in the data. He didn't seem to have room in his head to stack much of a brain, but maybe he didn't keep it there. Come to think of it, humans wear their brains in an exposed position; there may be better ways.

But *he* certainly had a brain. He pinned me down like a beetle and squeezed out what he wanted. He didn't have to stop to brainwash me; he questioned and I gave, for an endless time—it seemed more like days than hours. He spoke English badly but understandably. His labials were all alike—*buy* and *pie* and *vie* sounded the same. His gutturals were harsh and his dentals had a clucking quality. But I could usually understand and when I didn't, he didn't threaten or punish; he just tried again. He had no expression in his speech.

He kept at it until he had found out who I was and what I did and as much of what I knew as interested him. He asked questions about how I happened to be where I was and dressed the way I was when I was picked up. I couldn't tell whether he liked the answers or not.

He had trouble understanding what a "soda jerk" was and, while he learned of the Skyway Soap contest, he never seemed to understand why it took place. But I found that there were a lot of things I didn't know either—such as how many people there are on Earth and how many tons of protein we produce each year.

After endless time he had all he

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wanted and said, "Take it out." The stooges had been waiting. The fat boy gulped and said, "Space him?"

He acted as if killing me or not were like saving a piece of string. "No. It is ignorant and untrained, but I may have use for it later. Put it back in the pen."

"Yes, boss."

They dragged me out. In the corridor Fatty said, "Let's untie his feet and make him walk."

Skinny said, "Shaddap."

Peewee was just inside the entrance panel but didn't move, so I guess she had had another dose of that blue-light effect. They stepped over her and dumped me. Skinny chopped me on the side of the neck to stun me. When I came to, they were gone, I was unstrapped, and Peewee was sitting by me. She said anxiously, "Pretty bad?"

"Uh, yeah," I agreed, and shivered. "I feel ninety years old."

"It helps if you don't look *at him*—especially his eyes. Rest a while and you'll feel better." She glanced at her watch. "It's only forty-five minutes till we land. You probably won't be disturbed before then."

"Huh?" I sat up. "I was in there only an *hour*?"

"A little less. But it seems forever. I know."

"I feel like a squeezed orange." I frowned, remembering something. "Peewee, I wasn't too scared when they came for me. I was going to demand to be turned loose and insist on explanations. But I never asked *him* a question, not one."

"You never will. I tried. But your will just drains out. Like a rabbit in front of a snake."

"Yes."

"Kip, do you see why I had to take just any chance to get away? You didn't seem to believe my story—do you believe it now?"

"Uh, yes. I believe it."

"Thanks. I always say I'm too proud to care what people think, but I'm not, really. I had to get back to Daddy and tell him . . . because he's the only one in the entire world who would simply believe me, no matter how crazy it sounded."

"I see. I guess I see. But how did you happen to wind up in Centerville?"

"Centerville?"

"Where I live. Where Junebug called Peewee."

"Oh. I never meant to go there. I meant to land in New Jersey, in Princeton if possible, because I had to find Daddy."

"Well, you sure missed your aim."

"Can you do better? I would have done all right but I had my elbow joggled. Those things aren't hard to fly; you just aim and push for where you want to go, not like the complicated things they do about rocket ships. And I had

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the Mother Thing to coach me. But I had to slow down going into the atmosphere and compensate for Earth's spin and I didn't know quite how. I found myself too far west and they were chasing me and I didn't know *what* to do . . . and then I heard you on the space-operations band and thought everything was all right—and there I was." She spread her hands. "I'm sorry, Kip."

"Well, you landed it. They say any landing you walk away from is a good one."

"But I'm sorry I got you mixed up in it."

"Uh . . . don't worry about that. It looks like somebody has to get mixed up in it. Peewee . . . what's *he* up to?"

"*They*, you mean."

"Huh? I don't think the other two amount to anything. *He* is the one."

"I didn't mean Tim and Jock—they're just people gone bad. I mean *them—him* and others like him."

I wasn't my sharpest—I had been knocked out three times and was shy a night's sleep and more confusing things had happened than in all my life. But until Peewee pointed it out I hadn't considered that there could be more than one like *him*—one seemed more than enough.

But if there was one, then there were thousands—maybe millions or billions. I felt my stomach twist and wanted to hide. "You've seen others?"

"No. Just *him*. But the Mother Thing told me."

"Ugh! Peewee . . . what are they up to?"

"Haven't you guessed? They're moving in on us."

My collar felt tight. "How?"

"I don't know."

"You mean they're going to kill us off and take over Earth?"

She hesitated. "It might not be anything that nice."

"Uh . . . make slaves of us?"

"You're getting warmer. Kip—I think they eat meat."

I swallowed. "You have the jolliest ideas, for a little girl."

"You think I like it? That's why I had to tell Daddy."

There didn't seem to be anything to say. It was an old fear for human beings. Dad had told me about an invasion-from-Mars radio broadcast when he was a kid—pure fiction but it had scared people silly. But people didn't believe in it now; ever since we got to the Moon and circled Mars and Venus everybody seemed to agree that we weren't going to find life anywhere.

Now here it was, in our laps. "Peewee? Are these things Martians? Or from Venus?"

She shook her head. "They're not from anywhere close. The Mother Thing tried to tell me, but we ran into a difficulty of understanding."

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"Inside the Solar System?"

"That was part of the difficulty. Both yes and no."

"It can't be both."

"*You* ask her."

"I'd like to." I hesitated, then blurted, "I don't care where they're from—we can shoot them down . . . if we don't have to look at them!"

"Oh, I hope so!"

"It figures. You say these are flying saucers . . . real saucer sightings, I mean; not weather balloons. If so, they have been scouting us for years. Therefore they aren't sure of themselves, even if they do look horrible enough to curdle milk. Otherwise they would have moved in at once the way we would on a bunch of animals. But they haven't. That means we can kill them—if we go about it right."

She nodded eagerly. "I hope so. I hoped Daddy would see a way. But"—she frowned at me—"Daddy always warned me not to be cocksure when data were incomplete. 'Don't make so much stew from one oyster, Peewee,' he always says."

"But I'll bet we're right. Say, who is your Daddy? And what's your full name?"

"Why, Daddy is Professor Reisfeld. And my name is Patricia Wynant Reisfeld. Isn't that awful? Better call me Peewee."

"Professor Reisfeld—What does he teach?"

"Huh? You don't *know*? You don't know about Daddy's Nobel Prize? Or anything?"

"I'm just a country boy, Peewee. Sorry."

"You must be. Daddy doesn't *teach* anything. He *thinks*. He thinks better than anybody . . . except me, possibly. He's the synthesist. Everybody else specializes. Daddy knows everything and puts the pieces together."

Maybe so, but I hadn't heard of him. It sounded like a good idea . . . but it would take an awfully smart man—if I had found out anything, it was that they could print it faster than I could study it. Professor Reisfeld must have three heads. Five.

"Wait till you meet him," she added, glancing at her watch. "Kip, I think we had better get braced. We'll be landing in a few minutes . . . and *he* won't care how he shakes up passengers."

So we crowded into the narrow end and braced each other. We waited. After a bit the ship shook itself and the floor tilted. There was a slight bump and things got steady and suddenly I felt very light. Peewee pulled her feet under her and stood up. "Well, we're on the Moon."

V

When I was a kid, we used to pretend we were making the first landing on the Moon. Then I gave

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up romantic notions and realized that I would have to go about it another way. But I never thought I would get there penned up, unable to see out, like a mouse in a shoe box.

The only thing that proved I was on the Moon was my weight. High gravity can be managed anywhere, with centrifuges. Low gravity is another matter; on Earth the most you can squeeze out is a few seconds going off a high board, or by parachute delay, or stunts in a plane.

If low gravity goes on and on, then wherever you are, you are *not* on Earth. Well, I wasn't on Mars; it had to be the Moon.

On the Moon I should weigh a little over 25 pounds. It felt about so—I felt light enough to walk on a lawn and not bend the grass.

For a few minutes I simply exulted in it, forgetting *him* and the trouble we were in, just heel-and-toe around the room, getting the wonderful feel of it, bouncing a little and bumping my head against the ceiling and feeling how slowly, slowly, slowly I settled back to the floor. Peewee sat down, shrugged her shoulders and gave a little smile, an annoyingly patronizing one. The "Old Moon Hand" – all of two weeks more of it than I had had.

It has its disconcerting tricks. Your feet have hardly any traction and they fly out from under you. I had to learn with muscles and reflexes what I had known only intellectually: that when weight goes down, mass and inertia do not. To change direction, even in walking, you have to lean the way you would to round a turn on a board track—and even then if you don't have traction (which I didn't in socks on a smooth floor) your feet go out from under you.

A fall doesn't hurt much in one-sixth gravity but Peewee giggled. I sat up and said, "Go on and laugh, smartie. You can afford to —you've got tennis shoes."

"I'm sorry. But you looked silly, hanging there like a slow-motion picture and grabbing air."

"No doubt. Very funny."

"I said I was sorry. Look, you can borrow my shoes."

I looked at her feet, then at mine, and snorted. "Gee, thanks!"

"Well . . . you could cut the heels out, or something. It wouldn't bother me. Nothing ever does. Where are your shoes, Kip?"

"Uh, about a quarter million miles away—unless we got off at the wrong stop."

"Oh. Well, you won't need them much, here."

"Yeah." I chewed my lip, thinking about "here" and no longer interested in games with gravity. "Peewee? What do we do now?"

"About what?"

"About *him*."

"Nothing. What *can* we do?"

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"Then what do we do?"

"Sleep."

"Huh?"

"Sleep. *'Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care.' 'Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.' 'Blessings on him who invented sleep, the mantle that covers all human thoughts.'*"

"Quit showing off and talk sense!"

"I *am* talking sense. At the moment we're as helpless as goldfish. We're simply trying to survive—and the first principle of survival is not to worry about the impossible and concentrate on what's possible. I'm hungry and thirsty and uncomfortable and very, very tired . . . and all I can do about it is sleep. So if you will kindly keep quiet, that's what I'll do."

"I can take a hint. No need to snap at me."

"I'm sorry. But I get cross as two sticks when I'm tired and Daddy says I'm simply frightful before breakfast."

At that she curled up in a little ball and tucked that filthy rag doll under her chin. "G'night, Kip."

"Good night, Peewee."

I thought of something and started to speak . . . and saw that she was asleep. She was breathing softly and her face had smoothed out and no longer looked alert and smart-alecky. Her upper lip pooched out in a baby pout and she looked like a dirty-faced cherub. There were streaks where she had apparently cried and not wiped it away. But she had never let me see her crying.

Kip, I said to myself, you get yourself into the darnedest things; this is much worse than bringing home a stray pup or a kitten.

But I had to take care of her . . . or die trying.

Well, maybe I would. "Die trying," I mean. It didn't look as if I were any great shakes even taking care of myself.

I yawned, then yawned again. Maybe the shrimp had more sense than I had, at that. I was more tired than I had ever been, and hungry and thirsty and not comfortable other ways. I thought about banging on the door panel and trying to attract the fat one or his skinny partner. But that would wake Peewee—and it might antagonize *him*.

So I sprawled on my back the way I nap on the living-room rug at home. I found that a hard floor does not require any one sleeping position on the Moon; one-sixth gravity is a better mattress than all the foam rubber ever made—that fussy princess in Háns Christian Andersen's story would have had no complaints.

I went to sleep at once.

It was the wildest space opera I had ever seen, loaded with dragons and Arcturian maidens

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and knights in shining space armor and shuttling between King Arthur's Court and the Dead Sea Bottoms of Barsoom. I didn't mind that but I did mind the announcer. He had the voice of Ace Quiggle and the face of *him*. He leaned out of the screen and leered, those wormy cilia writhing. *"Will Beowulf conquer the Dragon? Will Tristan return to Iseult? Will Peewee find her dolly? Tune in this channel tomorrow night and in the meantime, wake up and hurry to your neighborhood druggist for a cake of Skyway's Kwikbrite Armor Polish, the better polish used by the better knights sans peur et sans reproche.* WAKE UP!" *He shoved a snaky arm out of the screen and grabbed my shoulder.*

I woke up.

"Wake up," Peewee was saying, shaking my shoulder. "Please wake up, Kip."

"Lea' me alone!"

"You were having a nightmare."

The Arcturian princess had been in a bad spot. "Now I'll never know how it came out. Wha' did y' want to wake me for? I thought the idea was to sleep?"

"You've slept for hours—and now perhaps there is something we can do."

"Breakfast, maybe?"

She ignored that. "I think we should try to escape."

I sat up suddenly, bounced off the floor settled back. "How?"

"I don't know exactly. But I think they have gone away and left us. If so, we'll never have a better chance."

"They have? What makes you think so?"

"Listen. Listen hard."

I listened. I could hear my heart beat, I could hear Peewee breathing, and presently I could hear her heart beating. I've never heard deeper silence in a cave.

I took my knife, held it in my teeth for bone conduction and pushed it against a wall. Nothing. I tried the floor and the other walls. Still nothing. The ship ached with silence—no throb, no thump, not even those vibrations you can sense but not hear. "You're right, Peewee."

"I noticed it when the air circulation stopped."

I sniffed. "Are we running out of air?"

"Not right away. But the air stopped—it comes out of those tiny holes up there. You don't notice it but I missed something when it stopped."

"I'm not sure."

I tried the blade of my knife on a wall. It wasn't metal nor anything I knew as plastic, but it didn't mind a knife. Maybe the Comte de Monte Cristo could have dug a hole in it—but he had more time. "How do you figure?"

"Every time they've opened or closed that door panel, I've heard a click. So after they took you

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out I stuck a wad of bubble gum where the panel meets the wall, high up where they might not notice."

"You've got some gum?"

"Yes. It helps, when you can't get a drink of water. I—"

"Got any more?" I asked eagerly. I wasn't fresh in any way but thirst was the worst—I've never been so thirsty.

Peewee looked upset. "Oh, poor Kip! I haven't any more . . . just an old wad I kept parked on my belt buckle." She frowned. "But you can have it. You're welcome."

"Uh, thanks, Peewee. Thanks a lot. But I guess not."

She looked insulted. "I assure you, Mr. Russell, that I do not have anything contagious. I was merely trying to—"

"Yes, yes," I said hastily. "I'm sure you were. But—"

"I assumed that these were emergency conditions. It is surely no more unsanitary than kissing a girl—but then I don't suppose you've ever kissed a girl!"

"Not lately," I evaded. "But what I want is a drink of clear cold water—or murky warm water. Besides, you used up your gum on the door panel. What did you expect to accomplish?"

"Oh. I told you about that click. Daddy says that, in a dilemma, it is helpful to change any variable, then re-examine the problem. I tried to introduce a change with my bubble gum."

"Well?"

"When they brought you back, then closed the door, I didn't hear a click."

"*What?* Then you thought you had bamboozled their lock hours and hours ago—and you didn't tell *me?*"

"That is correct."

"Why, I ought to spank you!"

"I don't advise it," she said frostily. "I bite."

I believed her. And scratch. And other things. None of them pleasant. I changed the subject. "Why didn't you tell me, Peewee?"

"I was afraid you might try to get out."

"Huh? I certainly would've!"

"Precisely. But I *wanted* that panel closed . . . as long as *he* was out there."

Maybe she *was* a genius. Compared with me. "I see your point. All right, let's see if we can get it open." I examined the panel. The wad of gum was there, up high as she could reach, and from the way it was mashed it did seem possible that it had fouled the groove the panel slid into, but I couldn't see any crack down the edge.

I tried the point of my big blade on it. The panel seemed to creep to the right an eighth of an inch—then the blade broke.

I closed the stub and put the knife away. "Any ideas?"

"Maybe if we put our hands flat

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against it and tried to drag it?"

"OK." I wiped sweat from my hands on my shirt. "Now . . . easy does it. Just enough pressure for friction."

The panel slid to the right almost an inch—and stopped firmly.

But there was a hairline crack from floor to ceiling.

I broke off the stub of the big blade this time. The crack was no wider. Peewee said, "Oh, dear!"

"We aren't licked." I backed off and ran toward the door.

"Toward," not "to"—my feet skidded, I leveled off and did a leisurely bellywhopper. Peewee didn't laugh.

I picked myself up, got against the far wall, braced one foot against it and tried a swimming racing start.

I got as far as the door panel before losing my footing. I didn't hit it very hard, but I felt it spring. It bulged a little, then sprang back.

"Wait a sec, Kip," said Peewee. "Take your socks off. I'll get behind you and push — my tennis shoes don't slip."

She was right. On the Moon, if you can't get rubber-soled shoes, you're better off barefooted. We backed against the far wall, Peewee behind me with her hands on my hips. "One . . . two . . . three . . . Go!" We advanced with the grace of a hippopotamus.

I hurt my shoulder. But the panel sprung out of its track, leaving a space four inches wide at the bottom and tapering to the top.

I left skin on the door frame and tore my shirt and was hampered in language by the presence of a girl. But the opening widened. When it was wide enough for my head, I got down flat and peered out. There was nobody in sight—a foregone conclusion, with the noise I had made, unless they were playing cat-and-mouse. Which I wouldn't put past them. Especially *him*.

Peewee started to wiggle through; I dragged her back. "Naughty, naughty! I go first." Two more heaves and it was wide enough for me. I opened the small blade of my knife and handed it to Peewee. "With your shield or on it, soldier."

"You take it."

"I won't need it. 'Two-Fisted Death,' they call me around dark alleys." This was propaganda, but why worry her? *Sans peur and sans reproche* — maiden-rescuing done cheaply, special rates for parties.

I eased out on elbows and knees, stood up and looked around. "Come on out," I said quietly.

She started to, then backed up suddenly. She reappeared clutching that bedraggled dolly. "I almost forgot Madame Pompadour," she said breathlessly.

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I didn't even smile.

"Well," she said defensively, "I have to have her to get to sleep at night. It's my one neurotic quirk—but Daddy says I'll outgrow it."

"Sure, sure."

"Well, don't look so smug! It's not fetishism, not even primitive animism; it's merely a conditioned reflex. I'm aware that it's just a doll—I've understood the pathetic fallacy for . . . oh, years and years!"

"Look, Peewee," I said earnestly, "I don't care how you get to sleep. Personally I hit myself over the head with a hammer. But quit yakking. Do you know the lay-out of these ships?"

She looked around. "I think this is the ship that chased me. But it looks the same as the one I piloted."

"All right. Should we head for the control room?"

"Huh?"

"You flew the other heap. Can you fly this one?"

"Unh . . . I guess so. Yes, I can."

"Then let's go." I started the direction they had lugged me.

"But the other time I had the Mother Thing to tell me what to do! Let's find her."

I stopped. "Can you get it off the ground?"

"Well . . . yes."

"We'll look for her after we're in the air—'in space' I mean. If she's aboard we'll find her. If she's not, there's not a thing we can do."

"Well . . . all right. I see your logic; I don't have to like it." She tagged along. "Kip? How many gravities can you stand?"

"Huh? I haven't the slightest idea. Why?"

"Because these things can go lots easier than I dared try when I escaped before. That was my mistake."

"Your mistake was in heading for New Jersey."

"But I had to find Daddy!"

"Sure, sure, eventually. But you should have ducked over to Lunar Base and yelled for the Federation Space Corps. This is no job for a popgun; we need help. Any idea where we are?"

"Mmm . . . I think so. If *he* took us back to their base. I'll know when I look at the sky."

"All right. If you can figure out where Lunar Base is from here, that's where we'll go. If not . . . Well, we'll head for New Jersey at all the push it has."

The control-room door latched and I could not figure out how to open it. Peewee did what she said should work—which was to tuck her little finger into a hole mine would not enter—and told me it must be locked. So I looked around.

I found a metal bar racked in the corridor, a thing about five feet long, pointed on one end and with four handles like brass knucks on the other. I didn't know

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what it was—the hobgoblin equivalent of a fire ax, possibly—but it was a fine wrecking bar.

I made splinters of that door in three minutes. We went in.

My first feeling was gooseflesh because here was where I had been grilled by *him*. I tried not to show it. If *he* turned up, I was going to let him have his wrecking bar right between his grisly eyes. I looked around, really seeing the place for the first time. There was sort of a nest in the middle surrounded by what could have been a very fancy coffee maker or a velocipede for an octopus; I was glad Peewee knew which button to push. "How do you see out?"

"Like this." Peewee squeezed past and put a finger into a hole I hadn't noticed.

The ceiling was hemispherical like a planetarium. Which was what it was, for it lighted up. I gasped.

It was suddenly not a floor we were on, but a platform, apparently out in the open and maybe 30 feet in the air. Over me were star images, thousands of them, in a black "sky"—and facing toward me, big as a dozen full moons and green and lovely and beautiful, was Earth!

Peewee touched my elbow. "Snap out of it, Kip."

I said in a choked voice, "Peewee, don't you have any poetry in your soul?"

"Surely I have. Oodles. But we haven't time. I know where we are, Kip—back where I started from. Their base. See those rocks with long jagged shadows? Some of them are ships, camouflaged. And over to the left—that high peak, with the saddle?—a little farther left, almost due west, is Tombaugh Station, forty miles away. About two hundred miles farther is Lunar Base and beyond is Luna City."

"How long will it take?"

"Two hundred, nearly two hundred and fifty miles? Uh, I've never tried a point-to-point on the Moon—but it shouldn't take more than a few minutes."

"Let's go! They might come back any minute."

"Yes, Kip." She crawled into that jackdaw's nest and bent over a sector.

Presently she looked up. Her face was white and thin and very little-girlish. "Kip . . . we aren't going anywhere. I'm sorry."

I let out a yelp. "What! What's the matter? Have you forgotten how to run it?"

"No. The 'brain' is gone."

"The which?"

"The 'brain.' Little black dingus about the size of a walnut that fits in this cavity." She showed me. "We got away before because the Mother Thing managed to steal one. We were locked in an empty ship, just as you and I are now. But she had one and we got

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away." Peewee looked bleak and very lost. "I should have known that he wouldn't leave one in the control room—I guess I did and didn't want to admit it. I'm sorry."

"Uh . . . look, Peewee, we won't give up that easily. Maybe I can make something to fit that socket."

"Like jumping wires in a car?" She shook her head. "It's not that simple, Kip. If you put a wooden model in place of the generator in a car, would it run? I don't know quite what it does, but I called it the 'brain' because it's very complex."

"But—" I shut up. If a Borneo savage had a brand-new Edsel, complete except for spark plugs, would he get it running? Echo answers mournfully. "Peewee, what's the next best thing? Any ideas? Because if you haven't, I want you to show me the air lock. I'll take this"—I shook my wrecking bar—"and bash anything that comes through."

"I'm stumped," she admitted. "I want to look for the Mother Thing. If she's shut up in this ship, she may know what to do."

"All right. But first show me the air lock. You can look for her while I stand guard." I felt the reckless anger of desperation. I didn't see how we were ever going to get out and I was beginning to believe that we weren't—but there was still a reckoning due. *He* was going to learn that it wasn't safe to push people around. I was sure—I was fairly sure—that I could sock him before my spine turned to jelly. Splash that repulsive head.

If I didn't look at his eyes.

Peewee said slowly, "There's one other thing . . ."

"What?"

"I hate to suggest it. You might think I was running out on you."

"Don't be silly. If you've got an idea, spill it."

"Well . . . there's Tombaugh Station, over that way about forty miles. If my space suit is in the ship—"

I suddenly quit feeling like Bowie at the Alamo. Maybe the game would go an extra period—"We can walk it!"

She shook her head. "No, Kip. That's why I hesitated to mention it. *I* can walk it . . . if we find my suit. But you couldn't wear my suit even if you squatted."

"I don't need your suit," I said impatiently.

"Kip, Kip! This is the Moon, remember? No air."

"Yes, yes, sure! Think I'm an idiot? But if they locked up your suit, they probably put mine right beside it and—"

"*You've* got a space suit?" she said incredulously.

Our next remarks were too confused to repeat but finally Peewee was convinced that I really did own a space suit, that in fact the only reason I was sending on the space-operations band twelve

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hours and a quarter of a million miles back was that I was wearing it when they grabbed me.

"Let's tear the joint apart!" I said. "No—show me that air lock, then *you* take it apart."

"All right."

She showed me the lock, a room much like the one we had been cooped in, but smaller and with an inner door built to take a pressure load. It was not locked. We opened it cautiously. It was empty, and its outer door was closed or we would never have been able to open the inner. I said, "If Wormface had been a suspenders-and-belt man, he would have left the outer door open, even though he had us locked up. Then— Wait a second! Is there a way to latch the inner door open?"

"I don't know."

"We'll see." There was, a simple hook. But to make sure that it couldn't be unlatched by button-pushing from outside I wedged it with my knife. "You're sure this is the only air lock?"

"The other ship had only one and I'm pretty certain they are alike."

"We'll keep our eyes open. Nobody can get at us through this one. Even old Wormface has to use an air lock."

"But suppose he opens the outer door anyhow?" Peewee said nervously. "We'd pop like balloons."

I looked at her and grinned. "*Who* is a genius? Sure we would . . . if he did. But he won't. Not with twenty, twenty-five tons of pressure holding it closed. As you reminded me, this is the Moon. No air outside, remember?"

"Oh." Peewee looked sheepish.

So we searched. I enjoyed wrecking doors; Wormface wasn't going to like me. One of the first things we found was a smelly little hole that Fatty and Skinny lived in. The door was not locked, which was a shame. That room told me a lot about that pair. It showed that they were pigs, with habits as unattractive as their morals. The room also told me that they were not casual prisoners; it had been refitted for humans. Their relationship with Wormface, whatever it was, had gone on for some time and was continuing. There were two empty racks for space suits, several dozen canned rations of the sort sold in military-surplus stores, and best of all, there was drinking water and a washroom of sorts—and something more precious than fine gold or frankincense if we found our suits: two charged bottles of oxy-helium.

I took a drink, opened a can of food for Peewee—it opened with a key; we weren't in the predicament of the *Three Men in a Boat* with their tin of pineapple—told her to grab a bite, then search that room. I went on with my giant toad sticker; those

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charged air bottles had given me an unbearable itch to find our suits—and get out—before Wormface returned.

I smashed a dozen doors as fast as the Walrus and the Carpenter opened oysters and found all sorts of things, including what must have been living quarters for wormfaces. But I didn't stop to look—the Space Corps could do that, if and when—I simply made sure that there was not a space suit in any of them.

And found them!—in a compartment next to the one we had been prisoners in.

I was so glad to see Oscar that I could have kissed him. I shouted, "Hi, Pal! Mirabile visu!" and ran to get Peewee. My feet went out from under me again but I didn't care.

Peewee looked up as I rushed in. "I was just going to look for you."

"Got it! Got it!"

"You found the Mother Thing?" she said eagerly.

"Huh? No, no! The space suits—yours and mine! Let's go!"

"Oh." She looked disappointed and I felt hurt. "That's good . . . but we have to find the Mother Thing first."

I felt tried beyond endurance. Here we had a chance, slim but real, to escape a fate-worse-than-death (I'm not using a figure of speech) and *she* wanted to hang around to search for a bug-eyed monster. For any human being, even a stranger with halitosis, I would have done it. For a dog or a cat I would, although reluctantly.

But what was a bug-eyed monster to me? All this one had done was to get me into the worst jam I had ever been in.

I considered socking Peewee and stuffing her into her suit. But I said, "Are you crazy? We're leaving—right now!"

"We can't go till we find her."

"Now I know you're crazy. We don't even know she's here . . . and if we do find her, we can't take her with us."

"Oh, but we will!"

"How? This is the Moon, remember? No air. Got a space suit for her?"

"But—" That stonkered her. But not for long. She had been sitting on the floor, holding the ration can between her knees. She stood up suddenly, bouncing a little, and said, "Do as you like; I'm going to find her. Here." She shoved the can at me.

I should have used force. But I am handicapped by training from early childhood never to strike a female, no matter how richly she deserves it. So the opportunity and Peewee both slid past while I was torn between common sense and upbringing. I simply groaned helplessly.

Then I became aware of an unbearably attractive odor. I was

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holding that can. It contained boiled shoe leather and gray gravy and smelled ambrosial.

Peewee had eaten half; I ate the rest while looking at what she had found. There was a coil of nylon rope which I happily put with the air bottles; Oscar had 50 feet of clothesline clipped to his belt but that had been a penny-saving expedient. There was a prospector's hammer which I salvaged, and two batteries which would do for headlamps and things.

The only other items of interest were a Government Printing Office publication titled *Preliminary Report on Selenology,* a pamphlet on uranium prospecting, and an expired Utah driver's license for "Timothy Johnson"—I recognized the older man's mean face. The pamphlets interested me but this was no time for excess baggage.

The main furniture was two beds, curved like contour chairs and deeply padded; they told me that Skinny and Fatty had ridden this ship at high acceleration.

When I had mopped the last of the gravy with a finger, I took a big drink, washed my hands—using water lavishly because I didn't care if that pair died of thirst—grabbed my plunder and headed for the room where the space suits were.

As I got there I ran into Peewee. She was carrying the crowbar and looking overjoyed. "I found her!"

"Where?"

"Come on! I can't get it open, I'm not strong enough."

I put the stuff with our suits and followed her. She stopped at a door panel farther along the corridor than my vandalism had taken me. "In there!"

I looked and I listened. "What makes you think so?"

"I know! Open it!"

I shrugged and got to work with the nutpick. The panel went *spung!* and that was that.

Curled up in the middle of the floor was a creature.

So far as I could tell, it might or might not have been the one I had seen in the pasture the night before. The light had been poor, the conditions very different, and my examination had ended abruptly. But Peewee was in no doubt. She launched herself through the air with a squeal of joy and the two rolled over and over like kittens play-fighting.

Peewee was making sounds of joy, more or less in English. So was the Mother Thing, but not in English. I would not have been surprised if she had spoken English, since Wormface did and since Peewee had mentioned things the Mother Thing had told her. But she didn't.

Did you ever listen to a mockingbird? Sometimes singing melodies, sometimes just sending up

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a joyous noise unto the Lord? The endlessly varied songs of a mockingbird are nearest to the speech of the Mother Thing.

At last they held still, more or less, and Peewee said, "Oh, Mother Thing, I'm so happy!"

The creature sang to her. Peewee answered, "Oh. I'm forgetting my manners. Mother Thing, this is my dear friend Kip."

The Mother Thing sang to me:

—and I understood.

What she said was: *"I am very happy to know you, Kip."*

It didn't come out in words. But it might as well have been English. Nor was this half-kidding self-deception, such as my conversations with Oscar or Peewee's with Madame Pompadour—when I talk with Oscar I am both sides of the conversation; it's just my conscious talking to my subconscious, or some such. This was not that.

The Mother Thing sang to me and I understood.

I was startled but not unbelieving. When you see a rainbow you don't stop to argue the laws of optics. There it is, in the sky.

I would have been an idiot not to know that the Mother Thing was speaking to me because I *did* understand and understood her every time. If she directed a remark at Peewee alone, it was just bird songs—but if it was meant for me, I got it.

Call it telepathy if you like, although it doesn't seem to be what they do at Duke University. I never read her mind and I don't think she read mine. We just talked.

But while I was startled, I minded my manners. I felt the way I do when Mother introduces me to one of her older grande-dame friends. So I bowed and said, "We're very happy that we've found you, Mother Thing."

It was simple, humble truth. I knew, without explanation, what it was that had made Peewee stubbornly determined to risk recapture rather than give up looking for her—the quality that made her "the Mother Thing."

Peewee has this habit of slapping names on things and her choices aren't always apt, for my taste. But I'll never question this one. The Mother Thing was the Mother Thing because she *was*. Around her you felt happy and safe and warm. You knew that if you skinned your knee and came bawling into the house, she would kiss it well and paint it with merthiolate and everything would be all right. Some nurses have it and some teachers . . . and, sadly, some mothers don't.

But the Mother Thing had it so strongly that I wasn't even worried by Wormface. We had her with us so everything was go-

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ing to be all right. Logically I knew that she was as vulnerable as we were—I had seen them strike her down. She didn't have my size and strength, she couldn't pilot this ship as Peewee had been able to. It didn't matter.

I wanted to crawl into her lap. Since she was too small and didn't have a lap, I would gratefully hold her in mine, anytime.

I have talked more about my father but that doesn't mean that Mother is less important — just different. Dad is active, Mother is passive; Dad talks, Mother doesn't. But if she died, Dad would wither like an uprooted tree. She makes our world.

The Mother Thing had the effect on me that Mother has, only I'm used to it from Mother. Now I was getting it unexpectedly, far from home, when I *needed* it.

Peewee said excitedly, "Now we can go, Kip. Let's hurry!"

The Mother Thing sang:

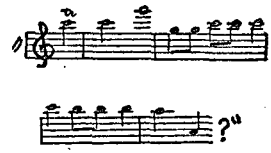
"Where are we going, children?"

"To Tombaugh Station, Mother Thing. They'll help us."

The Mother Thing blinked her eyes and looked serenely sad. She had great, soft compassionate eyes—she looked more like a lemur than anything else but she was not a primate—she wasn't even in our sequence, unearthly. But she had these wonderful eyes and a soft, defenseless mouth out of which music poured. She wasn't as big as Peewee and her hands were tinier still—six fingers, any one of which could oppose the others the way our thumbs can. Her body . . . well, it never stayed the same shape so it's hard to describe, but it was right for her.

She didn't wear clothes but she wasn't naked; she had soft, creamy fur, sleek and fine as chinchilla. I thought at first she didn't wear anything, but presently I noticed a piece of jewelry, a shiny triangle with a double spiral in each corner. I don't know what made it stick on.

I didn't take all this in at once. At that instant the expression in the Mother Thing's eyes brought a crash of sorrow into the happiness I had been feeling.

Her answer made me realize that she didn't have a miracle ready:

[*"How are we to fly the ship? They have guarded me most carefully this time."*]

Peewee explained eagerly about the space suits and I stood there like a fool, with a lump of ice in my stomach. What had been

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just a question of using my greater strength to force Peewee to behave was now an unsolvable dilemma. I could no more abandon the Mother Thing than I could have abandoned Peewee and there were only two space suits.

Even if she could wear our sort, which looked as practical as roller skates on a snake.

The Mother Thing gently pointed out that her own vacuum gear had been destroyed. (I'm going to quit writing down her songs; I don't remember them exactly anyhow.)

And so the fight began. It was an odd fight, with the Mother Thing gentle and loving and sensible and utterly firm, and Peewee throwing a tearful, bad-little-girl tantrum—and me standing miserably by, not even refereeing.

When the Mother Thing understood the situation, she analyzed it at once to the inevitable answer. Since she had no way to go (and probably couldn't have walked that far anyhow, even if she had had her sort of space suit), the only answer was for us two to leave at once. If we reached safety, then we would, if possible, convince our people of the danger from Wormface & Co. —in which case she might be saved as well . . . which would be nice but was not indispensable.

Peewee utterly, flatly, and absolutely refused to listen to any plan which called for leaving the Mother Thing behind. If the Mother Thing couldn't go, she wouldn't budge. "Kip! You go get help! Hurry! I'll stay here."

I stared at her. "Peewee, you know I can't do that."

"You must. You will so! You've *got* to. If you don't, I'll . . . I'll never speak to you again!"

"If I did, I'd never speak to myself again. Look, Peewee, it won't wash. You'll have to go—"

"No!"

"Oh, shut up for a change. You go and I stay and guard the door with the shillelagh. I'll hold 'em off while you round up the troops. But tell them to hurry!"

"I—" She stopped and looked very sober and utterly baffled. Then she threw herself on the Mother Thing, sobbing: "Oh, you don't *love* me anymore!"

Which shows how far her logic had gone to pot. The Mother Thing sang softly to her while I worried the thought that our last chance was trickling away while we argued. Wormface might come back any second—and while I hoped to slug him a final one if he got in, more likely he had resources to outmaneuver me. Either way, we would not escape.

At last I said, "We'll *all* go."

Peewee stopped sobbing and looked startled. "You know we can't."

The Mother Thing sang: [*"How, Kip?"*]

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"Uh, I'll have to show you. Up on your feet, Peewee." We went where the suits were, while Peewee carried Madame Pompadour and half-carried the Mother Thing.

Lars Eklund, the rigger who had first worn Oscar according to his log, must have weighed about two hundred pounds; in order to wear Oscar I had to strap him tight to keep from bulging. I hadn't considered retailoring him to my size as I was afraid I would never get him gas-tight again. Arm and leg lengths were OK; *it was girth that was too big.*

There was room inside for both the Mother Thing and me.

I explained, while Peewee looked big-eyed and the Mother Thing sang queries and approvals. Yes, she could hang on piggyback—and she couldn't fall off, once we were sealed up and the straps cinched.

"All right. Peewee, get into your suit." I went to get my socks while she started to suit up. When I came back I checked her helmet gauges, reading them backwards through her lens. "We had better give you some air. You're only about half full."

I ran into a snag. The spare bottles I had filched from those ghouls had screw-thread fittings like mine—but Peewee's bottles had bayonet-and-snap joints. OK, I guess, for tourists, chaperoned and nursed and who might get panicky while bottles were changed unless it was done fast; but not so good for serious work. In my workshop I would have rigged an adapter in twenty minutes. Here, with no real tools—well, that spare air might as well be on Earth for all the good it did Peewee.

For the first time, I thought seriously of leaving them behind while I made a fast forced march for help. But I didn't mention it. I thought that Peewee would rather die on the way than fall back into *his* hands—and I was inclined to agree.

"Kid," I said slowly, "that isn't much air. Not for forty miles." Her gauge was scaled in time as well as pressure; it read just under five hours. Could Peewee move as fast as a trotting horse? Even at lunar gravity? Not likely.

She looked at me soberly. "That's calibrated for full-size people. I'm little—I don't use much air."

"Uh . . . don't use it faster than you have to."

"I won't. Let's go."

I started to close her gaskets. "Hey!" she objected.

"What's the matter?"

"Madame Pompadour! Hand her to me—please. On the floor by my feet."

I picked up that ridiculous dolly and gave it to her. "How much air does *she* take?"

Peewee suddenly dimpled. "I'll

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caution her not to inhale." She stuffed it inside her shirt, I sealed her up. I sat down in my open suit, the Mother Thing crept up my back, singing reassuringly, and cuddled close. She felt good and I felt that I could hike a hundred miles, to get them both safe.

Getting me sealed in was cumbersome, as the straps had to be let out and then tightened to allow for the Mother Thing and neither Peewee nor I had bare hands. We managed.

I made a sling from my clothesline for the spare bottles. With them around my neck, with Oscar's weight and the Mother Thing as well, I scaled perhaps 50 pounds at the Moon's one-sixth g. It just made me fairly surefooted for the first time.

I retrieved my knife from the air-lock latch and snapped it to Oscar's belt beside the nylon rope and the prospector's hammer. Then we went inside the air lock and closed its inner door. I didn't know how to waste its air to the outside but Peewee did. It started to hiss out.

"You all right, Mother Thing?"

["*Yes, Kip.*"] She hugged me reassuringly.

"Peewee to Junebug," I heard in my phones, "radio check. Alfa, Bravo, Coca, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot—"

"Junebug to Peewee: I read you. Golf, Hotel, India, Kilo—"

"I read you, Kip."

"Roger."

"Mind your pressure, Kip. You're swelling up too fast." I kicked the chin valve while watching the gauge—and kicking myself for letting a little girl catch me in a greenhorn trick. But she had used a space suit before, while I had merely pretended to.

I decided this was no time to be proud. "Peewee? Give me all the tips you can. I'm new to this."

"I will, Kip."

The outer door popped silently and swung inward—and I looked out over the bleak bright surface of a lunar plain. For a homesick moment I remembered the trip-to-the-Moon games I had played as a kid and wished I were back in Centerville. Then Peewee touched her helmet to mine. "See anyone?"

"No."

"We're lucky, the door faces away from the other ships. Listen carefully. We won't use radio until we are over the horizon—unless it's a desperate emergency. They listen on our frequencies. I know that for sure. Now see that mountain with the saddle in it? Kip, pay attention!"

"Yes." I had been staring at Earth. She was beautiful even in that shadow show in the control room—but I just hadn't realized. There she was, so close I could almost touch her . . . and so far away that we might never get

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home. You can't believe what a lovely planet we have, until you see her from outside . . . with clouds girdling her waist and polar cap set jauntily, like a spring hat. "Yes. I see the saddle."

"We head left of there, where you see a pass. Tim and Jock brought me through it in a crawler. Once we pick up those tracks it will be easy. But first we head for those near hills just left of that—that ought to keep this ship between us and the others while we get out of sight."

It was twelve feet or so to the ground and I was prepared to jump, since it would be nothing much in that gravity. Peewee insisted on lowering me by rope. "You'll fall over your feet. Look, Kip, listen to old Aunt Peewee. You don't have Moon legs yet. It's going to be like your first time on a bicycle."

So I let her lower me and the Mother Thing while she snubbed the nylon rope around the side of the lock. Then she jumped with no trouble. I started to loop up the line but she stopped me and snapped the other end to her belt, then touched helmets. "I'll lead. If I go too fast or you need me, tug on the rope. I won't be able to see you."

"Aye aye, Cap'n!"

"Don't make fun of me, Kip. This is serious."

"I wasn't making fun, Peewee. You're boss."

"Let's go. Don't look back, it won't do any good and you might fall. I'm heading for those hills."

VI

I should have relished the weird, romantic experience, but I was as busy as Eliza crossing the ice and the things snapping at my heels were worse than bloodhounds. I wanted to look back but I was too busy trying to stay on my feet. I couldn't see my feet; I had to watch ahead and try to pick my footing—it kept me as busy as a lumberjack in a logrolling contest. I didn't skid as the ground was rough—dust or fine sand over raw rock—and 50 pounds weight was enough for footing. But I had 300 pounds mass not a whit reduced by lowered weight; this does things to lifelong reflex habits. I had to lean heavily for the slightest turn, lean back and dig in to slow down, lean far forward to speed up.

I could have drawn a force diagram, but doing it is another matter. How long does it take a baby to learn to walk? This newborn Moon-baby was having to learn while making a forced march, half blind, at the greatest speed he could manage.

So I didn't have time to dwell on the wonder of it all.

Peewee moved into a brisk pace and kept stepping it up. Every

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little while my leash tightened and I tried still harder to speed up and not fall down.

The Mother Thing warbled at my spine: [*"Are you all right, Kip? You seem worried."*]

"I'm . . . all right! How . . . about . . . *you*?"

[*"I'm very comfortable. Don't wear yourself out, dear."*]

"OK!"

Oscar was doing his job. I began to sweat from exertion and naked Sun, but I didn't kick the chin valve until I saw from my blood-color gauge that I was short on air. The system worked perfectly and the joints, under a four pound pressure, gave no trouble; hours of practice in the pasture were paying off. Presently my one worry was to keep a sharp eye for rocks and ruts. We were into those low hills maybe twenty minutes after H-hour. Peewee's first swerve as we reached rougher ground took me by surprise; I almost fell.

She slowed down and crept forward into a gulch. A few moments later she stopped; I joined her and she touched helmets with me. "How are you doing?"

"OK."

"Mother Thing, can you hear me?"

[*"Yes, dear."*]

"Are you comfortable? Can you breathe all right?"

[*"Yes, indeed. Our Kip is taking very good care of me, dear."*]

"Good. You behave yourself, Mother Thing. Hear me?"

[*"I will, dear."*] Somehow she put an indulgent chuckle into a bird song.

"Speaking of breathing," I said to Peewee, "let's check your air." I tried to look into her helmet.

She pulled away, then touched again. "I'm all right!"

"So you say." I held her helmet with both hands, found I couldn't see the dials—with sunlight around us, trying to see in was like peering into a well. "What does it read—and don't fib."

"Don't be nosy!"

I turned her around and read her bottle gauges. One read zero; the other was almost full!

I touched helmets. "Peewee," I said slowly, "how many miles have we come?"

"About three, I think. Why?"

"Then we've got more than thirty to go?"

"At least thirty-five. Kip, quit fretting. I know I've got one empty bottle; I shifted to the full one before we stopped."

"One bottle won't take you thirty-five miles."

"Yes, it will . . . because it's *got* to."

"Look, we've got plenty of air. I'll figure a way to get it to you." My mind was trotting in circles, thinking what tools were on my belt, what else I had.

"Kip, you know you can't hook

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those spare bottles to my suit—so shut up!"

["*What's the trouble, darlings? Why are you quarreling?*"]

"We aren't fighting, Mother Thing. Kip is a worry wart."

["*Now, children—*"]

I said, "Peewee, I admit I can't hook the spares into your suit . . . but I'll jigger a way to recharge your bottle."

"But— How, Kip?"

"Leave it to me. I'll touch only the empty; if it doesn't work, we're no worse off. If it does, we've got it made."

"How long will it take?"

"Ten minutes with luck. Thirty without."

"No," she decided.

"Now, Peewee, don't be sil—"

"I'm not being silly! We aren't safe until we get into the mountains. I can get that far. Then, when we no longer show up like a bug on a plate, we can rest and recharge my empty bottle."

It made sense. "All right."

"Can you go faster? If we reach the mountains before they miss us, I don't think they'll ever find us. If we don't—"

"I can go faster. Except for these pesky bottles."

"Oh." She hesitated. "Do you want to throw one away?"

"Huh? Oh, no, no! But they throw me off balance. I've just missed a tumble a dozen times. Peewee, can you retie them so they don't swing?"

"Oh. Sure."

I had them hung around my neck and down my front—not smart but I had been hurried. Now Peewee lashed them firmly, still in front as my own bottles and the Mother Thing were on my back—no doubt she was finding it as crowded as Dollar Day. Peewee passed clothesline under under my belt and around the yoke. She touched helmets. "I hope that's OK."

"Did you tie a square knot?"

She pulled her helmet away. A minute later she touched helmets again. "It was a granny," she admitted in a small voice, "but it's a square knot now."

"Good. Tuck the ends in my belt so that I can't trip, then we'll mush. Are you all right?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "I just wish I had salvaged my gum, old and tired as it was. My throat's awful dry."

"Drink some water. Not too much."

"Kip! It's not a nice joke."

I stared. "Peewee — your suit hasn't any *water?*"

"What? Don't be silly."

My jaw dropped. "But, baby," I said helplessly, "why didn't you fill your tank before we left?"

"What are you talking about? Does your suit have a water tank?"

I couldn't answer. Peewee's suit was for tourists—for those "scenic walks amidst incomparable gran-

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deur on the ancient face of the Moon" that the ads promised. Guided walks, of course, not over a half hour at a time – they wouldn't put in a water tank; some tourist might choke, or bite the nipple off and half-drown in his helmet, or some silly thing. Besides, it was cheaper.

I began to worry about other shortcomings that cheapjack equipment might have—with Peewee's life depending on it. "I'm sorry," I said humbly. "Look, I'll try to figure out some way to get water to you."

"I doubt if you can. I can't die of thirst in the time it'll take us to get there, so quit worrying. I'm all right. I just wish I had my bubble gum. Ready?"

"Uh . . . ready."

The hills were hardly more than giant folds in lava; we were soon through them, even though we had to take it cautiously over the very rough ground. Beyond them the ground looked flatter than western Kansas, stretching out to a close horizon, with mountains sticking up beyond, glaring in the Sun and silhouetted against a black sky like cardboard cutouts. I tried to figure how far the horizon was, on a thousand-mile radius and a height of eye of six feet—and couldn't do it in my head and wished for my slipstick. But it was awfully close, less than a mile.

Peewee let me overtake her, touched helmets. "OK, Kip? All right, Mother Thing?"

"Sure."

["*All right, dear.*"]

"Kip, the course from the pass when they fetched me here was east eight degrees north. I heard them arguing and sneaked a peek at their map. So we go back west eight degrees south—that doesn't count the jog to these hills but it's close enough to find the pass. OK?"

"Sounds swell." I was impressed. "Peewee, were you an Indian scout once? Or Davy Crockett?"

"Pooh! Anybody can read a map." She sounded pleased. "I want to check compasses. What bearing do you have on Earth?"

I said silently: Oscar, you've let me down. I've been cussing her suit for not having water – and *you* don't have a compass.

Oscar protested: ("Hey, pal, that's unfair! Why would I need a compass at Space Station Two? Nobody told *me* I was going to the Moon.") I said, "Peewee, this suit is for space station work. What use is a compass in space? Nobody told *me* I was going to the Moon."

"But— Well, don't stop to cry about it. You can get your directions by Earth."

"Why can't I use your compass?"

"Don't be silly; it's built into my helmet. Now just a moment—"

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She faced Earth, moved her helmet back and forth. Then she touched helmets again. "Earth is smacko on northwest . . . that makes the course fifty-three degrees left of there. Try to pick it out. Earth is two degrees wide, you know."

"I knew that before you were born."

"No doubt. Some people require a head start."

"Smart aleck!"

"You were rude first!"

"But— Sorry, Peewee. Let's save the fights for later. I'll spot you the first two bites."

"I won't need them! You don't know how nasty I can—"

"I have some idea."

["*Children! Children!*"]

"I'm sorry, Peewee."

"So am I. I'm edgy. I wish we were *there*."

"So do I. Let me figure the course." I counted degrees using Earth as a yardstick. I marked a place by eye, then tried again judging 53° as a proportion of 90°. The results didn't agree, so I tried to spot some stars to help me. They say you can see stars from the Moon even when the Sun is in the sky. Well, you can —but not easily. I had the Sun over my shoulder but was facing Earth, almost three-quarters full, and had the dazzling ground glare as well. The polarizer cut down the glare—and cut out the stars, too.

So I split my guesses and marked a spot. "Peewee? See that sharp peak with sort of a chin on its left profile? That ought to be the course, pretty near."

"Let me check." She tried it by compass, then touched helmets. "Nice going, Kip. Three degrees to the right and you've got it."

I felt smug. "Shall we get moving?"

"Right. We go through the pass, then Tombaugh Station is due west."

It was about ten miles to the mountains; we made short work of it. You can make time on the Moon—*if* it is flat and *if* you can keep your balance. Peewee kept stepping it up until we were almost flying, long low strides that covered ground like an ostrich—and, do you know, it's easier fast than slow. The only hazard, after I got the hang of it, was landing on a rock or hole or something and tripping. But that was hazard enough because I couldn't pick my footing at that speed. I wasn't afraid of falling; I felt certain that Oscar could take the punishment. But suppose I landed on my back? Probably smash the Mother Thing to jelly.

I was worried about Peewee, too. That cut-rate tourist suit wasn't as rugged as Oscar. I've read about explosive decompression—I never want to see it. Especially not a little girl. But I didn't dare use radio to warn her

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even though we were probably shielded from Wormface—and if I tugged on my leash I might make her fall.

The plain started to rise and Peewee let it slow us down. Presently we were walking, then we were climbing a scree slope. I stumbled but landed on my hands and got up—one-sixth gravity has advantages as well as hazards. We reached the top and Peewee led us into a pocket in the rocks. She stopped and touched helmets. "Anybody home? You two all right?"

["*All right, dear.*"]

"Sure," I agreed. "A little winded, maybe." That was an understatement but if Peewee could take it, I could.

"We can rest," she answered, "and take it easy from here on. I wanted to get us out of the open as fast as possible. They'll never find us here."

I thought she was right. A wormface ship flying over might spot us, if they could see down as well as up—probably just a matter of touching a control. But our chances were better now. "This is the time to recharge your empty bottle."

"OK."

None too soon—the bottle which had been almost full had dropped by a third, more like half. She couldn't make it to Tombaugh Station on that—simple arithmetic. So I crossed my fingers and got to work. "Partner, will you untie this cat's cradle?"

While Peewee fumbled at knots, I started to take a drink—then stopped, ashamed of myself. Peewee must be chewing her tongue to work up saliva by now—and I hadn't been able to think of *any* way to get water to her. The tank was inside my helmet and there was no way to reach it without making me—and the Mother Thing—dead in the process.

If I ever lived to be an engineer I'd correct that!

I decided that it was idiotic not to drink because she couldn't; the lives of all of us might depend on my staying in the best condition I could manage. So I drank and ate three malted-milk tablets and a salt tablet, then had another drink. It helped a lot but I hoped Peewee hadn't noticed. She was busy unwinding clothesline—anyhow it's hard to see into a helmet.

I took Peewee's empty bottle off her back, making darn sure to close her outside stop valve first—there's supposed to be a one-way valve where an air hose enters a helmet but I no longer trusted her suit; it might have more cost-saving shortcomings. I laid the empty on the ground by a full one, looked at it, straightened up and touched helmets. "Peewee, disconnect the bottle on the left side of my back."

"Why, Kip?"

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"Who's doing this job?" I had a reason but was afraid she might argue. My lefthand bottle held pure oxygen; the others were oxy-helium. It was full, except for a few minutes of fiddling last night in Centerville. Since I couldn't possibly give her bottle a full charge, the next best thing was to give her a half charge of straight oxygen.

She shut up and removed it.

I set about trying to transfer pressure between bottles whose connections didn't match. There was no way to do it properly, short of tools a quarter of a million miles away—or over in Tombaugh Station which was just as bad. But I did have adhesive tape.

Oscar's manual called for two first-aid kits. I didn't know what was supposed to be in them; the manual had simply given USAF stock numbers. I hadn't been able to guess what would be useful in an outside kit—a hypodermic needle, maybe, sharp enough to stab through and give a man morphine when he needed it terribly. But since I didn't know, I had stocked inside and outside with bandage, dressings, and a spool of surgical tape.

I was betting on the tape.

I butted the mismatched hose connections together, tore off a scrap of bandage and wrapped it around the junction—I didn't want sticky stuff on the joint; it could foul the operation on a suit. Then I taped the junction, wrapping tightly, working very painstakingly and taping three inches on each side as well as around the joint; if tape could restrain that pressure a few moments, there would still be one deuce of a force trying to drag that joint apart. I didn't want it to pull apart at the first jolt. I used the entire roll.

I motioned Peewee to touch helmets. "I'm about to open the full bottle. The valve on the empty is already open. When you see me start to close the valve on the full one, you close the other one—fast! Got it?"

"Close the valve when you do, quickly. Roger."

"Stand by. Get your hand on the valve." I grabbed that lump of bandaged joint in one fist, squeezed as hard as I could, and put my other hand on the valve. If that joint let go, maybe my hand would go with it—but if the stunt failed, little Peewee didn't have long to live. So I really gripped.

Watching both gauges, I barely cracked the valve. The hose quivered; the needle gauge that read EMPTY twitched. I opened the valve wide.

One needle swung left, the other right. Quickly they approached half charge. "Now!" I yelled uselessly and started closing the valve.

And felt that patchwork joint start to give.

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The hoses squeezed out of my fist but we lost only a fraction of gas. I found that I was trying to close a valve that was closed tight. Peewee had hers closed. The gauges each showed just short of half full—there was air for Peewee.

I sighed and found I had been holding my breath.

Peewee put her helmet against mine and said very soberly, "Thanks, Kip."

"Charton Drugs service, ma'am—no tip necessary. Let me tidy this mess, you can tie me and we'll go."

"You won't have to carry but one extra bottle now."

"Wrong, Peewee. We may do this stunt five or six times until there's only a whisper left"—or until the tape wears out, I added to myself. The first thing I did was to rewrap the tape on its spool—and if you think that is easy, wearing gloves and with the adhesive drying out as fast as you wind it, try it.

In spite of the bandage, sticky stuff had smeared the connections when the hoses parted. But it dried so hard that it chipped off the bayonet-and-snap joint easily. I didn't worry about the screw-thread joint; I didn't expect to use it on a suit. We mounted Peewee's recharged bottle and I warned her that it was straight oxygen. "Cut your pressure and feed from both bottles. What's your blood-color reading?"

"I've been carrying it low on purpose."

"Idiot! You want to keel over? Kick your chin valve! Get into normal range!"

We mounted one bottle I had swiped on my back, tied the other and the oxy bottle on my front, and were on our way.

Earth mountains are predictable; lunar mountains aren't, they've never been shaped by water. We came to a hole too steep to go down other than by rope and a wall beyond I wasn't sure we could climb. With pitons and snap rings and no space suits it wouldn't have been hard in the Rockies—but not the way we were. Peewee reluctantly led us back. The scree slope was worse going down—I backed down on hands and knees, with Peewee belaying the line above me. I wanted to be a hero and belay for her—we had a brisk argument. "Oh, quit being big and male and gallantly stupid, Kip! You've got four big bottles and the Mother Thing and you're top-heavy and I climb like a goat."

I shut up.

At the bottom she touched helmets. "Kip," she said worriedly, "I don't know what to do."

"What's the trouble?"

"I kept a little south of where the crawler came through. I wanted to avoid crossing right

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where the crawler crossed. But I'm beginning to think that there isn't any other way."

"I wish you had told me before."

"But I didn't want them to find us! The way the crawler came is the first place they'll look."

"Mmm . . . yes." I looked up at the range that blocked us. In pictures, the mountains of the Moon look high and sharp and rugged; framed by the lens of a space suit they simply look impossible.

I touched helmets again. "We might find another way—if we had time and air and the resources of a major expedition. We've got to take the route the crawler did. Which way?"

"A little way north . . . I think."

We tried to work north along the foothills but it was slow and difficult. Finally we backed off to the edge of the plain. It made us jumpy but it was a chance we had to take. We walked, briskly but not running, for we didn't dare miss the crawler's tracks. I counted paces and when I reached a thousand I tugged the line; Peewee stopped and we touched helmets. "We've come half a mile. How much farther do you think it is? Or could it possibly be behind us?"

Peewee looked up at the mountains. "I don't know," she admitted. "Everything looks different."

"We're lost?"

"Uh . . . it *ought* to be ahead somewhere. But we've come pretty far. Do you want to turn around?"

"Peewee, I don't even know the way to the post office."

"But what should we *do*?"

"I think we ought to keep going until you are absolutely certain the pass can't be any farther. You watch for the pass and I'll watch for crawler tracks. Then, when you're *certain* that we've come too far, we'll turn back. We can't afford to make short casts like a dog trying to pick up a rabbit's scent."

"All right."

I had counted two thousand more paces, another mile, when Peewee stopped. "Kip? It can't be ahead of us. The mountains are higher and solider than ever."

"You're sure? Think hard. Better to go another five miles than to stop too short."

She hesitated. She had her face pushed up close to her lens while we touched helmets and I could see her frown. Finally she said, "It's not up ahead, Kip."

"That settles it. To the rear, march! 'Lay on, Macduff, and damn'd be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!"' "

"*King Lear*."

"*Macbeth*. Want to bet?"

Those tracks were only half a mile behind us—I had missed them. They were on bare rock

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with only the lightest covering of dust, the Sun had been over my shoulder when we first crossed them, and the caterpillar-tread marks hardly showed—I almost missed them going back.

They led off the plain and straight up into the mountains.

We couldn't possibly have crossed those mountains without following the crawler's trail; Peewee had had the optimism of a child. It wasn't a road; it was just something a crawler on caterpillar treads could travel. We saw places that even a crawler hadn't been able to go until whoever pioneered it set a whopping big blast, backed off and waited for a chunk of mountain to get out of the way. I doubt if Skinny and Fatty carved that goat's path; they didn't look fond of hard work. Probably one of the exploration parties. If Peewee and I had attempted to break a new trail, we'd be there yet, relics for tourists of future generations.

But where a tread vehicle can go, a man can climb. It was no picnic; it was trudge, trudge, trudge, up and up and up—watch for loose rock and mind where you put your feet. Sometimes we belayed with the line. Nevertheless it was mostly just tedious.

When Peewee had used that half charge of oxygen, we stopped and I equalized pressures again, this time being able to give her only a quarter charge—like Achilles and the tortoise, I could go on indefinitely giving her half of what was left . . . if the tape held out. It was in bad shape but the pressure was only half as great and I managed to keep the hoses together until we closed valves.

I should say that *I* had it fairly easy. I had water, food pills, dexedrine. The last was enormous help, anytime I felt fagged I borrowed energy with a pep-pill. Poor Peewee had nothing but air and courage.

She didn't even have the cooling I had. Since she was on a richer mix, one bottle being pure oxygen, it did not take as much flow to keep up her blood-color index—and I warned her not to use a bit more than necessary; she could not afford air for cooling, she had to save it to breathe.

"I know, Kip," she answered pettishly. "I've got the needle jiggling the red right now. Think I'm a fool?"

"I just want to keep you alive."

"All right, but quit treating me as a child. You put one foot in front of the other. I'll make it."

"Sure you will!"

As for the Mother Thing, she always *said* she was all right and she was breathing the air I had (a trifle used), but I didn't know what was hardship to her. Hanging by his heels all day would kill a man; to a bat it is a nice rest—yet bats are our cousins.

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I talked with her as we climbed. It didn't matter what; her songs had the effect on me that it has to have your own gang cheering. Poor Peewee didn't even have that comfort, except when we stopped and touched helmets—we still weren't using radio; even in the mountains we were fearful of attracting attention.

We stopped again and I gave Peewee one-eight of a charge. The tape was in very poor shape afterwards; I doubted if it would serve again. I said, "Peewee, why don't you run your oxy-helium bottle dry while I carry this one? It'll save your strength."

"I'm all right."

"Well, you won't use air so fast with a lighter load."

"You have to have your arms free. Suppose you slip?"

"Peewee, I won't carry it in my arms. My righthand backpack bottle is empty; I'll chuck it. Help me make the change and I'll still be carrying only four—just balanced evenly."

"Sure, I'll help. But I'll carry my own bottles. Honest, Kip, the weight isn't anything. But if I run the oxy-helium bottle dry, what would I breathe while you're giving me my next charge?"

I didn't want to tell her that I had doubts about another charge, even in those ever smaller amounts. "OK, Peewee."

She changed bottles for me; we threw the dead one down a black hole and went on. I don't know how far we climbed nor how long; I know that it seemed like days—though it couldn't have been, not on that much air. Besides mile after mile of trail we climbed vertically at least eight thousand feet. Heights are hard to guess—but I've seen mountains I knew the heights of. Look it up yourself—the first range east of Tombaugh Station.

That's a lot of climbing, even at one-sixth g.

It seemed endless because I didn't know how far it was nor how long it had been. We both had watches—under our suits. A helmet ought to have a built-in watch. I should have read Greenwich time from the face of Earth. But I had no experience and most of the time I couldn't see Earth because we were deep in mountains—anyhow I didn't know what time it had been when we left the ship.

Another thing space suits should have is rear-view mirrors. While you are at it, add a window at the chin so that you can see where you step. But of the two, I would take a rear-view mirror. You can't glance behind you; you have to turn your entire body. Every few seconds I wanted to see if they were following us—and I couldn't spare the effort. All that nightmare trek I kept imagining them on my heels, expecting a wormy hand on my

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shoulder. I listened for footsteps which couldn't be heard in vacuum anyhow.

When you buy a space suit, make them equip it with a rear-view mirror. You won't have Wormface on your trail but it's upsetting to have even your best friend sneak up behind you. Yes, and if you are coming to the Moon, bring a sunshade. Oscar was doing his best and York had done an honest job on the air-conditioning—but the untempered Sun is hotter than you would believe and I didn't dare use air just for cooling anymore than Peewee could.

It got hot and stayed hot and sweat ran down and I itched all over and couldn't scratch and sweat got into my eyes and burned. Peewee must have been parboiled. Even when the trail wound through deep gorges lighted only by reflection off the far wall, so dark that we turned on headlamps, I still was hot—and when we curved back into naked sunshine, it was almost unbearable. The temptation to kick the chin valve, let air pour in and cool me, was almost too much. The desire to be cool seemed more important than the need to breathe an hour hence.

If I had been alone, I might have done it and died. But Peewee was worse off than I was. If she could stand it, I *had* to.

I had wondered how we could be so lost so close to human habitation—and how crawly monsters could hide a base only 40 miles from Tombaugh Station. Well, I had time to think and could figure it out because I could see the Moon around me.

Compared with the Moon the Arctic is swarming with people. The Moon's area is about equal to Asia—with fewer people than Centerville. It might be a century before anyone explored that plain where Wormface was based. A rocket ship passing over wouldn't notice anything even if camouflage hadn't been used; a man in a space suit would never go there; a man in a crawler would find their base only by accident even if he took the pass we were in and ranged around that plain. The lunar mapping satellite could photograph it and rephotograph, then a technician in London might note a tiny difference on two films. Maybe. Years later somebody might check up . . . if there wasn't something more urgent to do in a pioneer outpost where *everything* is new and urgent.

As for radar sightings—there were unexplained radar sightings before I was born.

Wormface could sit there, as close to Tombaugh Station as Dallas is to Fort Worth, and not fret, snug as a snake under a house. Too many square miles, not enough people.

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Too incredibly many square miles . . . Our whole world was harsh bright cliffs and dark shadows and black sky, and endless putting one foot in front of the other.

But eventually we were going downhill oftener than up and at weary last we came to a turn where we could see out over a hot bright plain. There were mountains awfully far away; even from our height, up a thousand feet or so, they were beyond the horizon. I looked out over that plain, too dead beat to feel triumphant, then glanced at Earth and tried to estimate due west.

Peewee touched her helmet to mine. "There it is, Kip."

"Where?" She pointed and I caught a glint on a silvery dome.

The Mother Thing trilled at my spine. [*"What is it, Children?"*]

"Tombaugh Station, Mother Thing."

Her answer was wordless assurance that we were good children and that she had known that we could do it.

The station may have been ten miles away. Distances were hard to judge, what with that funny horizon and never anything for comparison—I didn't even know how big the dome was. "Peewee, do we dare use radio?"

She turned and looked back. I did also; we were about as alone as could be. "Let's risk it."

"What frequency?"

"Same as before. Space operations. I think."

So I tried. "Tombaugh Station. Come in, Tombaugh Station. Do you read me?" Then Peewee tried. I listened up and down the band I was equipped for. No luck.

I shifted to horn antenna, aiming at the glint of light. No answer.

"We're wasting time, Peewee. Let's start slogging."

She turned slowly away. I could feel her disappointment—I had trembled with eagerness myself. I caught up with her and touched helmets. "Don't let it throw you, Peewee. They can't listen all day for us to call. We see it, now we'll walk it."

"I know," she said dully.

As we started down we lost sight of Tombaugh Station, not only from twists and turns but because we dropped it below the horizon. I kept calling as long as there seemed any hope, then shut it off to save breath and battery.

We were about halfway down the outer slope when Peewee slowed and stopped—sank to the ground and sat still.

I hurried to her. "Peewee!"

"Kip," she said faintly, "could you go get somebody? Please? You know the way now. I'll wait here. Please, Kip?"

"Peewee!" I said sharply. "Get up! You've got to keep moving."

"I c-c-can't!" She began to cry. "I'm so thirsty . . . and my legs—"

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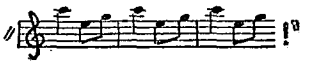
Then she passed out on me.

"Peewee!" I shook her shoulder. "You *can't* quit now! Mother Thing!—you tell her!"

Her eyelids fluttered. "Keep telling her, Mother Thing!" I flopped Peewee over and got to work. Hypoxia hits as fast as a jab on the button. I didn't need to see her blood-color index to know it read DANGER; the gauges on her bottles told me. The oxygen bottle showed empty, the oxy-helium tank was practically so. I closed her exhaust valves, overrode her chin valve with the outside valve and let what was left in the oxy-helium bottle flow into her suit. When it started to swell I cut back the flow and barely cracked one exhaust valve. Not until then did I close stop valves and remove the empty bottle.

I found myself balked by a ridiculous thing.

Peewee had tied me too well; I couldn't reach the knot! I could feel it with my left hand but couldn't get my right hand around; the bottle on my front was in the way—and I couldn't work the knot loose with one hand.

I made myself stop panicking. My knife—of course, my knife! It was an old Scout knife with a loop to hang it from a belt, which was where it was. But the map hooks on Oscar's belt were large for it and I had had to force it on. I twisted it until the loop broke.

Then I couldn't get the little blade open. Space-suit gauntlets don't have thumbnails.

I said to myself: Kip, quit running in circles. This is easy. All you have to do is open a knife—and you've *got* to . . . because Peewee is suffocating. I looked around for a sliver of rock, anything that could pinch-hit for a thumbnail. Then I checked my belt.

The prospector's hammer did it, the chisel end of the head was sharp enough to open the blade. I cut the clothesline away.

I was still blocked. I wanted very badly to get at a bottle on my back. When I had thrown away that empty and put the last fresh one on my back, I had started feeding from it and saved the almost-half charge in the other one. I meant to save it for a rainy day and split it with Peewee. Now was the time—she was out of air, I was practically so in one bottle but still had that half charge in the other—plus an eighth of a charge or less in the bottle that contained straight oxygen. Instead of giving her a one-sixteenth charge of oxygen (the best I could hope for in equalizing pressures), I had planned to surprise her with a one-quarter charge of oxy-helium, which would last

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longer and give more cooling.

A real knight-errant plan, I thought. I didn't waste two seconds discarding it.

I *couldn't* get that bottle off my back!

Maybe if I hadn't modified the backpack for non-regulation bottles I could have done it. The manual says: "*Reach over your shoulder with the opposite arm, close stop valves at bottle and helmet, disconnect the shackle . . .*" My pack didn't have shackles; I had substituted straps. But I still don't think you can reach over your shoulder in a pressurized suit and do anything effective. I think that was written by a man at a desk. Maybe he had seen it done under favorable conditions. Maybe he had done it, but was one of those freaks who can dislocate both shoulders. But I'll bet a full charge of oxygen that the riggers around Space Station Two did it for each other as Peewee and I had, or went inside and deflated.

If I ever get a chance, I'll change that. *Everything* you have to do in a space suit should be arranged to do in *front*—valves, shackles, everything, even if it is to affect something in back. We aren't like Wormface, with eyes all around and arms that bend in a dozen places; we're built to work in *front* of us—that goes triple in a space suit.

You need a chin window to let you see what you're doing, too! A thing can look fine on paper and be utterly crumby in the field.

But I didn't waste time moaning; I had a one-eighth charge of oxygen I could reach. I grabbed it.

That poor overworked adhesive tape was a sorry mess. I didn't bother with bandage; if I could get the tape to stick at all I'd be happy. I handled it as carefully as gold leaf, trying to get it tight, and stopped in the middle to close Peewee's exhaust entirely when it looked as if her suit was collapsing. I finished with trembling fingers.

I didn't have Peewee to close a valve. I simply gripped that hay-wired joint in one hand, opened Peewee's empty bottle with the other, swung over fast and opened the oxygen bottle wide—jerked my hand across and grabbed the valve of Peewee's bottle and watched those gauges.

The two needles moved toward each other. When they slowed down I started closing her bottle —and the taped joint blew out.

I got that valve closed in a hurry; I didn't lose much gas from Peewee's bottle. But what was left on the supply side leaked away. I didn't stop to worry; I peeled away a scrap of adhesive, made sure the bayonet-and-snap joint was clean, got that slightly recharged bottle back on Peewee's

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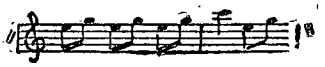
suit, opened stop valves.

Her suit started to distend. I opened one exhaust valve a crack and touched helmets. "Peewee! Peewee! Can you hear me? Wake up, baby! Mother Thing!—make her wake up!"

"Peewee!"

"Yes, Kip?"

"Wake up! On your feet, Champ! Get up! Honey, *please* get up."

"Huh? Help me get my helmet off . . . I can't *breathe.*"

"Yes, you can. Kick your chin valve—feel it, taste it. Fresh air!"

She tried, feebly; I gave her a quick strong shot, overriding her chin valve from outside. *"Oh!"*

"See? You've got air. You've got lots of air. Now get up."

"Oh, *please,* just let me lie here."

"No, you don't! You're a nasty, mean, spoiled little brat—and if you don't get up, nobody will love you. The Mother Thing won't love you. Mother Thing—tell her!"

[*"Stand up, daughter!"*]

Peewee tried. I helped her, once she was trying. She trembled and clung to me and I kept her from falling. "Mother Thing?" she said faintly. "I did it. You . . . still love me?"

[*"Yes, darling!"*]

"I'm dizzy . . . and I don't think I . . . can walk."

"You don't have to, honey," I said gently and picked her up in my arms. "You don't have to walk any farther."

She didn't weigh anything.

The trail disappeared when we were down out of the foothills but the crawler's tracks were sharp in the dust and led due west. I had my air trimmed down until the needle of the blood-color indicator hung at the edge of the danger sector. I held it there, kicking my chin valve only when it swung past into DANGER. I figured that the designer must have left some leeway, the way they do with gasoline gauges.

I counted paces and every half mile I told Peewee to call Tombaugh Station. It was over the horizon but they might have a high mast that could "see" a long way.

The Mother Thing talked to her, too—anything to keep her from slipping away again. It saved my strength to have the Mother Thing talk and helped us all.

After a while I noticed that my needle had drifted into the red again. I kicked the valve and waited. Nothing happened. I kicked it again and the needle drifted slowly toward the white. "How you fixed for air, Peewee?"

"Just fine, Kip, just fine."

Oscar was yelling at me. I blinked and noticed that my

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shadow had disappeared. It had been stretched out ahead at an angle to the tracks. The tracks were there but my shadow was not. That made me sore, so I turned around and looked for it. It was behind me.

The darn thing had been hiding. Games!

("That's better!" said Oscar.)

"It's hot in here, Oscar."

("You think it's cool out here? Keep your eye on that shadow, bud—and on those tracks.")

"There's darn little air in here, Oscar."

"Breathe shallow, chum.")

"I'm breathing my socks, now."

("So breathe your shirt.")

"Did I see a ship pass over?"

("How should I know? You're the one with the blinkers.")

I was sitting on the ground with Peewee across my knees and Oscar was really shouting—and so was the Mother Thing. ("Get up, you big ape! Get up and *try*.") [*"Get up, Kip dear! Only a little way now."*]

"I just want to get my wind."

("All right, you've got it. Call Tombaugh Station.")

I said, "Peewee, call Tombaugh Station."

She didn't answer. That scared me and I snapped out of it. "Tombaugh Station, come in! Come in, Tombaugh Station!"

I got to my knees and then to my feet. "Tombaugh Station, do you read me? Help! Help!"

A voice answered, "I read you."

"Help! *M'aidez!* I've got a little girl dying! Help!"

Suddenly it sprang up in front of my eyes—great shiny domes, tall towers, radio telescopes, a giant Schmidt camera. I staggered toward it. *"May Day!"*

An enormous lock opened and a crawler came toward me. A voice in my phones said, "We're coming. Stay where you are. Over and out."

A crawler stopped near me. A man got out, came over and touched helmets. I gasped: "Help me get her inside."

I got back: "You've given me trouble, bub. I don't like people who give me trouble." A bigger, fatter man got out behind him.

The smaller man raised a thing like a camera and aimed it at me. That was the last I knew....

In the next instalment, Kip and Peewee and the Mother Thing travel a bit further (for five days at eight gravities to begin with), and Kip learns that the whole problem is more far-reaching—and that there is substantially more going on in the universe—than he had even remotely conceived of....Don't think of missing it!

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One of the firmest traditions in science fiction has been that of the Writing Editor. Some editors (such as John W. Campbell, Jr.) have been among the most prolific and influential writers in the field; others (such as F. Orlin Tremaine) have been almost unknown outside of the editorial chair, but even they have had a few pieces of published fiction to their credit. The most notable exception to this tradition has been Robert P. Mills, editor of Venture *since 1956, managing editor of F&SF since 1949 and for the next few months, editor-in-chief of this magazine (see announcement, page 130). But the force of tradition is insidiously powerful: and now at last we can welcome Bob Mills as a full-fledged fiction-writing member of the Editors' Guild.*

The Last Shall Be First

by ROBERT P. MILLS

THE LAST ROOM IN THE WORLD was in the first spaceship, and the first spaceship was also the last spaceship, and it had never left the ground.

The last man in the world, on the other hand, had no reason to believe that he was in any sense the first man, for there was no other animal life on Earth, and he was not, he thought resignedly, self-reproducing. His resignation was largely perfunctory, because he was really quite happy.

The world was rich and fertile, the air pure and winy, and the man by nature ascetic, philosophical—and fearful. And now there was nothing to fear, for evil on Earth had gone with the last breath of the last rival for the position of king of the Universe.

Much as the man admired the simple way of life, however, he was not handy, and his attempts at creating satisfactory shelter out of hand-hewn logs and river mud had been miserable failures. He found his present arrangement a most happy compromise. . . . He had simply erected his cabin inside the main cabin of the spaceship, which was made of a metal that promised to endure forever.

Unlike, fortunately, all other materials that man had created

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by perverting the natural forms of the materials around him.

By unrelenting concentration, the man had managed totally to forget the artificial nature of the shell protecting him from the occasionally argumentative elements. He even ignored the steady march of the hands on the cesium clock.

He reveled in the conscienceless life everywhere around him—life that offered no threat, life that made no judgments, life that supported him, life that carried him on its lifting shoulder across an infinite reach toward a shore that could be only Elysium.

He had thought of the thick forests as cathedrals; now he no longer channeled his thinking with terminology, and his feeling was less respect and awe than it was shared, towering strength. As he gazed out over an endless plain choked with wheat, he smiled paternally. When the apple trees were heavy with blossoms, he breathed on them so that they would be healthy.

While somewhere in a black deep the last coelacanth sank into the bottom silt and died.

And the last man sat in his room as a storm raged up from the south, and young trees slashed the sky with their tender, hopeful branches, small floods washed down healed gullies, and lightning sprang from the fat-bellied clouds. And the man was content, because the only hell was in the past, which was no longer.

Then, almost imperceptibly, the hands on the cesium clock that had fragmented and spewed out the hours and minutes and seconds of the man's march toward safe immortality, slowed, and stopped . . . and turned backwards. The hands turned back from midnight, announced the retreating twilight. And the strong winds turned, and the torrents from the antiseptic sky flowed rushingly upwards, and the thunder roaring from beyond the hill was followed by split daggers of lightning gutting the retreating clouds.

The man realized at once, never having been certain, really *certain*, once in his long lone life, knowing that it had been hopeless, that every man must have his hell—even if the Universe must turn grumbling in its unimaginably cumbersome orbit to bite him, to chew him, to spit him back into the pit; knowing that *every* man must have his chance at hell, and if there ever existed a hell without men, then men must be found to fill it, even if time must be turned.

The man knew, and when the knock came at the door, he sighed. And when the knock came again, he gathered himself, and raised his voice effortfully.

"Not today . . . not today. . . . Come back yesterday."

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On her thirteenth wedding anniversary, Leslie Jones sold her first story. This, which you are about to read, is a "first" in more than the usual sense: not merely the first story she succeeded in selling, but literally the first she had tried to write. Before that her time had been taken up with having children (two boys, now 12 and 1), beating her high-school-teaching husband at chess ("he is generally better than I at everything else") and "devising schedules so I can make better use of my time (I never have time to try them)." She must also have put in a good deal of time observing people and their motives, public and private, in order to write a first story so perceptively malicious as

The Devil and Mrs. Ackenbaugh

by LESLIE JONES

MRS. ACKENBAUGH AND MR. Crumb were good friends for a long time. They talked about many things and each felt that he had never had such an understanding friend. Eventually they introduced their marriage partners to each other and then the four of them were family friends. Mr. Crumb would drive Mrs. Ackenbaugh home from the office where they both worked and the two couples would have dinner together and play records and talk and talk and talk.

One day, on the way home, Mr. Crumb turned to Mrs. Ackenbaugh and said, "You know, you have the most beautiful hair I've ever seen." After that, Mrs. Ackenbaugh was in love with Mr. Crumb because when she was with him she felt as if she were beautiful, but when she was with Mr. Ackenbaugh she felt a little plain. But of course, she said nothing to Mr. Crumb about her love. She merely wrapped it up in a neat little ribbon so that she could take it out and enjoy it when she was alone.

She had worked ever since she married because Mr. Ackenbaugh was taking his post-graduate work at the university and they needed her salary to make ends meet. But, a few weeks after she fell in love with Mr. Crumb, her husband won his degree and took a position in a small college in a

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small resort town by a lake.

It was a pleasant town and Yvette Ackenbaugh gave herself up delightfully to the responsibilities of complete leisure. She lay for hours in the sun and learned to swim and lost a bulge or two which had annoyed her and became refreshed and rested and altogether an improvement over her former self. The sun was strong and it changed her pale white skin to gold and put streaks of pure bronze in her hair. Sometimes, as she lay in the sun, she thought without regret of Mr. Crumb. All in all, it was a dream-like year and she eventually stopped thinking at all and drifted through each day as it came.

And then Mr. Clarence Crumb drove down to see them. His doctor had decided he should take a little rest before his blood pressure went any higher and Mr. Crumb had decided to see his old friends again. His wife sent along a little note saying she would like to have come but she felt that she and her husband deserved a vacation from each other.

When Yvette saw Mr. Crumb she felt all her love return stronger than ever . . . for she felt younger and healthier and more capable of having a strong emotion now. She introduced him to her routine of lying in the sun by the lake and the two of them began a pleasant interval of lazy days filled with desultory talk and a little swimming. Their talk more and more concerned just the two of them, and when Mr. Ackenbaugh returned home from his classes in the afternoons, they had to stop a minute and re-orient themselves to his existence. One day Mr. Crumb said, "You look all golden lying there in the sun." He also said a number of other things but he and Yvette both knew that he had really said he loved her. After that, they were in each others' arms a great deal and they whispered senselessly, "Yvette, Yvette," and "Clarence, Clarence."

But the day came when he had to return home. His leave of absence was up, his blood pressure was down, and his wife had started calling daily to inquire tenderly about his health. They parted with a feeling of sadness because they did not know each other well enough to know whether this was the end or the beginning for them.

When Mrs. Ackenbaugh fell in love with Mr. Crumb, she had felt practically the same as ever except for having something nice to think about. But when Mr. Crumb fell in love with *her* she had a strange reaction. She felt not only enchanted but enchanting, not only bewitched but bewitching—bewitched, bewitching, and beautiful.

She looked with wonder in the

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mirror, and hugged herself, and said ecstatically, "Clarence loves me." She saw herself through the eyes of her lover and was enchanted with what she saw. Mr. Ackenbaugh seemed to notice a change in her too. For he became more affectionate in his fumbling way and Mrs. Ackenbaugh found herself torn between annoyance and compassion for him.

She did not know what to do. Sometimes she felt an almost overpowering urge to call Mr. Crumb in the city and say "I can't stand it. Come take me away where we can be together!" But the sight of her husband sitting and correcting his students' papers and looking up at her with fond satisfaction was enough to stop her. And there was the memory of the talk she and Mr. Crumb had had before he left. They had agreed that they were too intelligent and sensible to break up two marriages. She couldn't violate that agreement now and show him that she was weak and selfish. And there was that horrible thought lurking somewhere back of her consciousness that if Mr. Crumb had to make a choice he might not choose her. . . .

The outward result of her inner guilt was that she became kinder and kinder to her husband. She found herself insisting on helping him with the dull business of grading papers. So they sat side by side during the lengthening evenings while she read the themes of the students and even read a few books.

She found herself becoming interested in one of his courses, almost against her will. It was a history course and dealt with superstition and witchcraft in the Middle Ages and Mrs. Ackenbaugh found herself strangely fascinated by some of the morbid and weird rituals. She had always considered herself too sophisticated to put stock in superstitions but now, caught in the spell of some of the old books, it came to her that the world must have been an exciting place when you could have a ring to twist on your finger and make a wish, or when you could draw a six-pointed star within a circle and summon a malignant spirit.

She made little jokes to Mr. Ackenbaugh about her decision to become a witch but somehow she knew that she was trying to cover up a growing conviction that her future held something highly unusual. A strange restlessness began to grow inside her. It was very much as if she were waiting for something, but for what?

Her walks about the countryside grew longer and sometimes she even found herself slipping out after dinner to see the moonlight slide over the dry grass. She felt an expectancy, an urgency, that was almost unbearable.

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And then, after one particularly quiet and ordinary Friday evening meal with Mr. Ackenbaugh, she knew that the waiting was over. Her pulses throbbed *"Tonight"* as she slipped on a sweater and walked out through brittle oak branches to a moon-washed clearing. She sat solemnly down on a mound of dry grass and then she saw him in the pale light at the edge of the clearing.

He had combed his hair so the horns scarcely showed and as he glided toward her soundlessly Mrs. Ackenbaugh was hardly nervous at all. And then she was aware of nothing but his eyes. They were enormous compelling eyes which were either green or gray or blue and there were flecks like the seafoam swirling in their depths. Somehow, it seemed as though the secrets of the whole world were in those eyes if she could only look into them long enough.

Then he closed his eyes for a full minute and she was able to pull herself back to the present. "D-did you come to bargain for my soul?"

He looked a little amused and a little bored. "Good Heavens, no. That sort of thing is dreadfully archaic."

"But . . . you did come looking for me."

"On the contrary, it is you who came looking for me." He looked at her kindly. "Did you think I would have come at all if you hadn't been one of us?"

Mrs. Ackenbaugh felt somewhat chilled all of a sudden but did manage to remember the business at hand. "Well, will you help me then?"

The Devil stroked his chin with a horny-looking hand. "First, let me ask why don't you and Mr. Crumb simply get divorces and marry each other? This is done by hundreds of people every day and nobody cares much, one way or the other."

Mrs. Ackenbaugh said, "Well, we promised each other, I mean, neither of us wants to cause any sorrow. I mean, my husband needs me and his wife is older than I and not as pretty and it would just be cruel."

He waved his arm disgustedly. "So, you really want to enjoy all the pleasures of forbidden fruit but you want to do it while thinking of yourself as noble." His lip curled slightly.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh was stung by this unglamorized view of herself. "I should think you'd be the last person to criticize anyone. But can you manage for Clarence and me to be together without hurting anyone?"

"You'd be surprised at the things I can manage," he said. "You could have Mr. Crumb without any change in your domestic arrangements, but I warn you, the price is high for those who

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want to eat their cake and have it too. This goes for Crumbs too," and he cackled in a high-pitched cracked voice.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh winced at the atrocious pun, for she was a woman of some taste and discrimination, but nevertheless she hastened to say, "Oh, I'd pay anything if I could have Clarence the rest of my life without hurting George and Ruth!"

The Devil suddenly waved his leathery arm, grew several inches and became imperious in manner. "Hear then," he intoned; "the Devil's gifts have three prices and you must agree in advance to accept them all and pay them without complaint. Do you agree?"

Mrs. Ackenbaugh looked into his eyes, which now seemed to be more smoke than seawater, and said, "Agreed," before she could change her mind.

"Then hear the agreement," he said solemnly. "You are to have Mr. Crumb and there shall be no change in either his or your domestic arrangements. And the first of your three prices is that the bargain is irrevocable; you can never turn back."

"As if I would ever want to," said Mrs. Ackenbaugh.

"And," he said, "the second of your prices is that there is a third price and you will not know what that is until it is too late." Suddenly his laugh was very unpleasant.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh shivered involuntarily. "Well, that sounds sort of sinister, not to mention silly . . . but I'm agreed." She leaned forward. "Now tell me, how is this going to happen?"

He chuckled. "That you will know soon enough, too soon perhaps. You will wake up late tomorrow morning and you will be amazed at the turn of events." Suddenly he was not there anymore; there was only the echo of a harsh laugh.

She slept that night as if an anesthetic hand had been laid on her brow. Consciousness returned slowly when she felt strong, warm sunlight flooding her face. She worried that George would be late for school, then she remembered it was Saturday. Something was at the edge of her consciousness nagging at her, a premonition, a small danger signal. And then remembrance forced her wide awake. She opened her eyes to see a strange ceiling overhead, and the walls were a different color. She raised herself cautiously on one elbow and found herself staring into Mr. Crumb's relaxed open mouth. How much he resembled her own husband in sleep! Mrs. Ackenbaugh felt an urge to shake him and tell him to close his mouth.

But the strangeness and wonder of it held her speechless. She flopped back down on her back

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to assimilate the miracle. She was really *with Clarence!* She thought with brief regret of her own husband so far away and lonely. And what about Ruth Crumb: where had she gone to? "But I'll worry about that later," she thought luxuriously. She stretched an arm out to touch Clarence's shoulder but paused as she stared at the outstretched hand: there were tiny black hairs growing down the back of her hand instead of the golden down she was accustomed to. And the fingers were stubbier. . . .

Suddenly she leaped out of bed with a wild yell, "My body!" She ran toward the mirror, already knowing and dreading what it would show: Ruth Crumb's round ordinary good-natured face topping Ruth's ordinary short plump body.

Mr. Crumb was groggily pulling himself up out of bed. He looked at her with an absolutely blank stare, grunted, and resumed fumbling with the frayed belt of his bathrobe.

The phone rang shrilly and she was still standing there numb when she heard Clarence's sleepy "Hullo." Then he was thrusting the phone into her hands and she could hear her own high-pitched voice chattering away. "Ruth darling," this impostor was saying, "I woke up practically in the middle of the night with the most wonderful idea. George has Thanksgiving Week holiday and I felt I just had to see you both again. Would it be a terrible imposition if we asked you to put us up for a couple of days?"

The former Mrs. Ackenbaugh heard herself saying, "Of course not, Yvette dear, we'd love to have you. . . ."

When she hung up, the new Mrs. Crumb stumbled into the bedroom and put her new plain face in her new stubby hands. Now she saw what the third price was.

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At this year's World Science Fiction Convention, known as the Solacon, I shall be the toastmaster, and I look forward to one of the happiest moments in my speaking career when I introduce Richard Matheson as the Convention's Guest of Honor. Only 32 today, Matheson made his debut 8 years ago in F&SF (Summer, 1950) with the now-classic Born of Man and Woman*—one of the two most impressive first-stories I've ever read. (The other, for the curious, is Stanley Ellin's* Specialty of the House, *EQMM, May, 1948.) Since then he has been extraordinarily successful both critically and commercially, with a long string of distinguished short stories and novelets, two suspense novels, two s-f. novels, one splendid mixture of the two (the recent* A STIR OF ECHOES), *and much film-writing including* THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN. *Two years ago, at a west-coast regional convention, I heard Matheson deliver the most intelligent and moving speech I've ever listened to from a guest of honor—a candid discussion of commercialism and artistic integrity. Matheson knows, both intellectually and intuitively, how to combine these two vital factors; and I hope all readers of F&SF who can do so will join me in duly honoring him at the Solacon.*

(To register for the Convention, which will be held in Los Angeles, at the Hotel Alexandria, over the weekend of August 29-September 1, send $2 now *to 16th World Science Fiction Convention, 10202 Belcher, Downey, California. See you there!)*

The Edge

by RICHARD MATHESON

IT WAS ALMOST TWO BEFORE THERE was a chance for lunch. Until then his desk was snow-banked with demanding papers, his telephone rang constantly and an army of insistent visitors attacked his walls. By twelve, his nerves were pulled like violin strings knobbed to their tightest. By one, the strings drew close to shearing; by one thirty they began to snap. He had to get away; now, immediately; flee to some shadowy restaurant booth, have a

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cocktail and a leisurely meal; listen to somnolent music. He had to.

Down on the street, he walked beyond the zone of eating places he usually frequented, not wishing to risk seeing anyone he knew. About a quarter of a mile from the office he found a cellar restaurant named Franco's. At his request, the hostess led him to a rear booth where he ordered a martini; then, as the woman turned away, he stretched out his legs beneath the table and closed his eyes. A grateful sigh murmured from him. This was the ticket. Dim-lit comfort, Muzak thrumming at the bottom fringe of audibility, a curative drink. He sighed again. A few more days like this, he thought, and I'm gone.

"Hi, Don."

He opened his eyes in time to see the man drop down across from him. "How goes it?" asked the man.

"What?" Donald Marshall stared at him.

"Gawd," said the man. "What a day, what a day." He grinned tiredly. "You, too?"

"I don't believe—" began Marshall.

"*Ah*," the man said, nodding, pleased, as a waitress brought the martini. "That for me. Another, please; dryer than dry."

"Yes, sir," said the waitress and was gone.

"There," said the man, stretching. "No place like Franco's for getting away from it all, eh?"

"Look here," said Marshall, smiling awkwardly. "I'm afraid you've made a mistake."

"Hmmm?" The man leaned forward, smiling back.

"I say I'm afraid you've made a mistake."

"I have?" The man grunted. "What'd I do, forget to shave? I'm liable to. No?" he said as Marshall frowned. "Wrong tie?"

"You don't understand," said Marshall.

"What?"

Marshall cleared his throat. "I'm—not who you think I am," he said.

"Huh?" The man leaned forward again, squinting. He straightened up, chuckling. "What's the story, Don?" he asked.

Marshall fingered at the stem of his glass. "Yes, what is the story?" he said, less politely now.

"I don't get you," said the man.

"Who do you think I am?" asked Marshall, his voice rising a little.

The man began to speak, gaped a trifle, then began to speak again. "What do you mean who do I—?" He broke off as the waitress brought the second martini. They both sat quietly until she was gone.

"Now," said the man, curiously.

"Look, I'm not going to accuse you of anything," said Marshall, "but you don't know me. You've

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never met me in your whole life."

"I don't—!" The man couldn't finish; he looked flabbergasted. "*I don't know you!*" he said.

Marshall had to laugh. "Oh, this is ludicrous," he said.

The man smiled appreciatively. "I knew you were ribbing me," he admitted, "but—" He shook his head. "You had me going there for a second."

Marshall put down his glass, the skin beginning to tighten across his cheeks.

"I'd say this had gone about far enough," he said. "I'm in no mood for—"

"*Don,*" the man broke in. "What's wrong?"

Marshall drew in a deep breath, then let it waver out. "Oh, well," he said, "I suppose it's an honest mistake." He forced a smile. "Who *do* you think I am?"

The man didn't answer. He looked at Marshall intently.

"*Well?*" asked Marshall, beginning to lose patience.

"This isn't a joke?" said the man.

"Now, look—"

"No, wait, wait," said the man, raising one hand. "I . . . suppose it's possible there could be two men who look so much alike they—"

He stopped abruptly and looked at Marshall. "Don, you're *not* ribbing me, are you?"

"Now listen to me—!"

"All right, I apologize," said the man. He sat gazing at Marshall for a moment; then he shrugged and smiled perplexedly. "I could have sworn you were Don Marshall," he said.

Marshall felt something cold gathering around his heart.

"I am," he heard himself say.

The only sound in the restaurant was that of the music and the delicate clink of silverware.

"What is this?" asked the man.

"You tell me," said Marshall in a thin voice.

"You—" The man looked carefully at him. "This is not a joke," he said.

"Now see here!"

"All right, all right." The man raised both his hands in a conciliatory gesture. "It's not a joke. You claim I don't know you. All right. Granting that leaves us with —with *this:* a man who not only looks exactly like my friend but has exactly the same name. Is this possible?"

"Apparently so," said Marshall.

Abruptly, he picked up his glass and took momentary escape in the martini. The man did the same. The waitress came for their orders and Marshall told her to come back later.

"What's your name?" he asked then.

"Arthur Nolan," said the man.

Marshall gestured conclusively. "I don't know you," he said. There was a slight loosening of tension in his stomach.

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The man learned back and stared at Marshall. "This is fantastic," he said. He shook his head. "Utterly fantastic."

Marshall smiled and lowered his eyes to the glass.

"Where do you work?" asked the man.

"American - Pacific Steamship," Marshall answered, glancing up. He felt a beginning of enjoyment in himself. This was, certainly, something to take one's mind off the wrack of the day.

The man looked examiningly at him; and Marshall sensed the enjoyment fading.

Suddenly the man laughed.

"You must have had one sweet hell of a morning, buddy," he said.

"What?"

"No more," said the man.

"Listen—"

"I capitulate," said Nolan, grinning. "You're curdling my gin."

"Listen to me, damn it!" snapped Marshall.

The man looked startled. His mouth fell open and he put his drink down. "Don, what is it?" he asked, concerned now.

"You do not know me," said Marshall, very carefully. "I do not know you. Will you kindly accept that?"

The man looked around as if for help. Then he leaned in close and spoke, his voice soft and worried.

"Don, listen. Honestly. You don't know me?"

Marshall drew in a deep breath, teeth clenched against rising fury. The man drew back. The look on his face was, suddenly, frightening to Marshall.

"One of us is out of his mind," Marshall said. The levity he'd intended never appeared in his voice.

Nolan swallowed raggedly. He looked down at his drink as if unable to face the other man.

Marshall suddenly laughed. "Dear Lord," he said, "what a scene. You really think you know me, don't you?"

The man grimaced. "The Don Marshall I know," he said, "also works for American-Pacific."

Marshall shuddered. "That's impossible," he said.

"No," said the man flatly.

For a moment Marshall got the notion that this was some sort of insidious plot against him; but the distraught expression on the man's face weakened the suspicion. He took a sip of his martini, then, carefully, set down the glass and laid his palms on the table as if seeking the reinforcement of its presence.

"American - Pacific Steamship Lines?" he asked.

The man nodded once. "Yes."

Marshall shook his head obdurately. "No," he said. "There's no other Marshall in our office. Unless," he added, quickly, "one of our clerks downstairs—"

"You're an—" The man broke

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off nervously. "He's an executive," he said.

Marshall drew his hands in slowly and put them in his lap. "Then I don't understand," he said. He wished, instantly, he hadn't said it.

"This . . . man told you he worked there?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes."

"Can you prove he works there?" Marshall challenged, his voice breaking, "Can you prove his name is really Don Marshall?"

"Don, I—"

"Well, *can* you?"

"Are you married?" asked the man.

Marshall hesitated. Then, clearing his throat, he said, "I am."

Nolan leaned forward. "To Ruth Foster?" he asked.

Marshall couldn't hide his involuntary gasp.

"Do you live on the Island?" Nolan pressed.

"Yes," said Marshall, weakly, "but—"

"In Huntington?"

Marshall hadn't even the strength to nod.

"Did you go to Columbia University?"

"*Yes*, but—" His teeth were on edge now.

"Did you graduate in June, nineteen forty?"

"No!" Marshall clutched at this. "I graduated in January, nineteen forty-one. Forty-*one*!"

"Were you a lieutenant in the Army?" asked Nolan, paying no attention.

Marshall felt himself slipping. "Yes," he muttered, "but you said—"

"*In the Eighty-Seventh Division?*"

"Now wait a minute!" Marshall pushed aside the nearly empty glass as if to make room for his rebuttal. "I can give you two very good explanations for this . . . this fool confusion. One: a man who looks like me and knows a few things about me is pretending to be me; Lord knows why. Two: you know about me and you're trying to snare me into something. No, you can argue all you like!" he persisted, almost frantically, as the man began to object. "You can ask all the questions you like; but I know who I am and I know who I know!"

"Do you?" asked the man. He looked dazed.

Marshall felt his legs twitch sharply.

"Well, I have no intention of s-sitting here and arguing with you," he said. "This entire thing is absurd. I came here for some peace and quiet—a place I've never even been to before and—"

"*Don, we eat here all the time.*" Nolan looked sick.

"That's nonsense!"

Nolan rubbed a hand across his mouth. "You . . . you actually think this is some kind of *con* game?" he asked.

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Marshall stared at him. He could feel the heavy pulsing of his heart.

"Or that—*my God*—that there's a man impersonating you? Don . . ." The man lowered his eyes. "I think—well, if I were you," he said quietly, "I'd—go to a doctor, a—"

"Let's stop this, shall we?" Marshall interrupted coldly, "I suggest one of us leave." He looked around the restaurant. "There's plenty of room in here."

He turned his eyes quickly from the man's stricken face and picked up his martini. "Well?" he said.

The man shook his head. "Dear God," he murmured.

"I said let's stop it," Marshall said through clenched teeth.

"That's it?" asked Nolan, incredulously. "You're willing to—to let it go at that?"

Marshall started to get up.

"No, no, wait," said Nolan. "I'll go." He stared at Marshall blankly. "I'll go," he repeated.

Abruptly, he pushed to his feet as if there were a leaden mantle around his shoulders.

"I don't know what so say," he said, "but—for God's sake, Don—see a doctor."

He stood by the side of the booth a moment longer, looking down at Marshall. Then, hastily, he turned and walked toward the front door. Marshall watched him leave.

When the man had gone he sank back against the booth wall and stared into his drink. He picked up the toothpick and mechanically stirred the impaled onion around in the glass. When the waitress came he ordered the first item he saw on the menu.

While he ate he thought about how insane it had been. For, unless the man Nolan was a consummate actor, he had been sincerely upset by what had happened.

What *had* happened? An out-and-out case of mistaken identity was one thing. A mistaken identity which seemed not quite wholly mistaken was another. How had the man known these things about him? About Ruth, Huntington, American-Pacific, even his lieutenancy in the 87th Division? *How?*

Suddenly, it struck him.

Years ago, he'd been a devotee of fantastic fiction—stories which dealt with trips to the moon, with traveling through time, with all of that. And one of the ideas used repeatedly was that of the alternate universe: a lunatic theory which stated that for every possibility there was a separate universe. Following this theory there might, conceivably, be a universe in which he knew this Nolan, ate at Franco's with him regularly and had graduated from Columbia a semester earlier.

It was absurd, really, yet there it was. What if, in entering

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Franco's, he had, accidentally, entered a universe one jot removed from the one he'd existed in at the office? What if, the thought expanded, people were, without knowing it, continually entering these universes one jot removed? What if he himself had continually entered them and never known until today—when, in an accidental entry, he had gone one step too far?

He closed his eyes and shuddered. Dear Lord, he thought; dear, heavenly Lord, I *have* been working too hard. He felt as if he were standing at the edge of a cliff waiting for someone to push him off. He tried hard not to think about his talk with Nolan. If he thought about it he'd have to fit it into the pattern. He wasn't prepared to do that yet.

After a while, he paid his check and left the restaurant, the food like cold lead in his stomach. He cabbed to Pennsylvania Station and, after a short wait, boarded a North Shore train. All the way to Huntington, he sat in the smoker car staring out at the passing countryside, an unlit cigarette between his fingers. The heavy pressure in his stomach wouldn't go away.

When Huntington was reached, he walked across the station to the cab stand and, deliberately, got into one of them.

"Take me home, will you?" He looked intently at the driver.

"Sure thing, Mr. Marshall," said the driver, smiling.

Marshall sank back with a wavering sigh and closed his eyes. There was a tingling at his fingertips.

"You're home early," said the driver. "Feeling poorly?"

Marshall swallowed. "Just a headache," he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

As he rode home, Marshall kept staring at the town, despite himself, looking for discrepancies, for *differences*. But there were none; everything was just the same. He felt the pressure letting up.

Ruth was in the living room, sewing.

"*Don.*" She stood and hurried to him. "Is something wrong?"

"No, no," he said, putting down his hat. "Just a headache."

"Oh." She led him, sympathetically, to a chair and helped him off with his suit coat and shoes. "I'll get you something right away," she said.

"Fine." When she was gone upstairs, Marshall looked around the familiar room and smiled at it. It was all right now.

Ruth was coming down the stairs when the telephone rang. He started up, then fell back again as she called, "I'll get it, darling."

"All right," he said.

He watched her in the hallway as she picked up the receiver and said hello. She listened. "Yes,

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darling," she said, automatically. "You—"

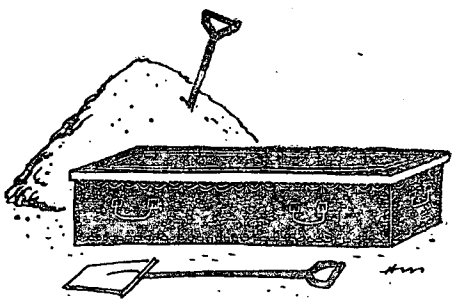
Then she stopped and, holding out the receiver, stared at it as if it were something monstrous in her hand.

She put it back to her ear. "You . . . won't be home until late?" she asked in a faint voice.

Marshall sat there gaping at her, the beats of his heart like someone striking at him. Even when she turned to look at him, the receiver lowered in her hand, he couldn't turn away. Please, he thought. Please don't say it. *Please.*

"Who are you?" she asked.

WE'VE FOUND SOMETHING FINE . . .



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Alex Apostolides is a 34-year-old San Franciscan living in exile amid the alien corn of Los Angeles, where he works "with an outfit that does films and things for the air force and the AEC." His prime objective is to return to his native civilization and settle down to full-time fiction writing and leisured enjoyment of sports cars, hi fi, books and the "pretty wonderful chick" to whom he is married. Obviously a highly rational man, he is also the possessor of a lively imagination and a gift for smooth, easy narrative—both evident in his first appearance in F&SF: a story of a child's Invisible Playmate which is not quite like any other you've read on that seemingly inexhaustible theme.

Sandy Had a Tiger

by ALEX APOSTOLIDES

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH KIDS. They'll take some object, any object—a teddy bear, a doll, a blanket—and endow it with some special property that makes it *the* blanket or *the* doll or *the* teddy bear. And it's not to be confused with anything else. *This* one's *it*.

And pretend-friends. Kids will find an imaginary friend and you can't see it and I can't see it, but the pretend-friend's *there*, for all our grownup blindness. Little girl across the court had one with blue hair she called Faeryanna. Little boy two houses down had an old Indian he called Jimeagle.

Sandy had a tiger.

The tiger came to live with us just before we went to San Francisco. (No, not to live—worse luck. Just a vacation, and at the end of the two weeks we had to come back to Los Angeles.)

I walked in one day and Sandy was sitting in the middle of the room, crooning some three-year-old song and petting the tiger.

"What you got there, boyboy?"

He gave me an off-hand look. "A tiger."

"That's nice." Go along with the gag, dad. "A *big* tiger?"

I got another look that said *Don't you know* ANYTHING—and "Naw, it's a baby tiger."

Then his eyes made big saucers and you could see the wheels turning behind them. "He—uh—he lost his mommy and I found

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him, and he's going to live with us and grow up, and when he's a big *big* tiger he's going to take care of me!"

And that took care of that.

We got ready for the trip. Goodby parties, as if we were going to another world. Promises to send postcards. Packing for a safari instead of a fortnight.

I'd almost finished stowing everything in the back of the car on Departure Day when Sandy's head poked out the back door.

"Hey, daddy, be sure and leave enough room for the tiger!"

"Aw, boy, you're not taking that thing along, are you?"

He got an incredulous look on his face for a moment. Then he smiled, sure that I was joking.

"Gee, he has to come along. Who'd take care of him while we're gone?"

"I think tigers can take care of themselves, boyboy."

He thought about this, but just for a moment. "He's just a baby, and besides he'll get angry if we leave without him and then he'd go away and never come back."

"Get another one, then."

"This one's mine." Sandy looked serious as only a three-year-old can. "And I need him. I really need him. Come on, daddy, make enough room for him. *Please*?"

So, he won. As usual. We left room for one pretend tiger.

But I couldn't leave well enough alone. I kicked it around.

"Sandy, boy—why do you need the tiger?"

"Why"— and it was the most natural thing in the world—"to *protect* me."

"From what?"

Again the incredulous look *What can a big person really know about it,* —and "From *things.*"

"What kind of things?"

He just looked at me. Obviously the question didn't even deserve an answer. Then he shrugged a little shrug and turned and went back in the house, and I heard his voice from the bedroom, saying joyously, "It's all right, tiger, don't cry any more. You're going with us. I fixed it."

And, later, we all piled in the car and waited until the tiger was safely bedded down and then hit the road for North and civilization.

We had a wonderful two weeks, smelling real air and walking real streets and seeing what a city looked like again. It was like a second honeymoon—grandparents make good babysitters.

We'd come in, Mary and I, after an afternoon of rediscovering San Francisco, to find Sandy and his favorite grandmother, Oglix (sandy-ese for 'Alix'), heads together in the middle of the living-room floor, playing, pretending, plotting.

This one day Sandy was telling Oglix all about the tiger as we

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came in, and she nodded and reached out to pet the tiger, saying, "I know they can't see him, but *we* can, can't we, Sandy?" And he nodded, just as serious as she was. (But, then, Oglix was always funny that way—believing that Prometheus really lived and that Mount Olympus was a real place and all the gods were real and not just the products of some myth.)

So, while we played along with it and Grandpa scoffed from the kitchen, the two of them spent the rest of the day playing with the tiger.

That night, at dinner, half-joking, I said to Oglix, "Play's play, but let's not take it *too* far. Sandy's lived, eaten, breathed and slept with that goddamn tiger ever since we left L. A. We had to stop twice on the way so the tiger could go to the toilet."

Grandpa laughed, but Oglix got a real serious look on her face and said, "Now, look, we all leave that wonderful child's world too soon, shut the door on all the beauty and the wonder of it. If he's happy with the tiger, leave the boy alone. Besides," and she smiled at Sandy, "it's a lovely tiger."

"And he's our friend!" Sandy chimed in.

What can you say? We finished dinner and went out to pubcrawl a bit. Looked in on Sandy to say goodnight, but he and Oglix were deep in an account of how Odysseus and his men got out of Cyclops' cave by clinging to the bellies of the sheep.

"Goodnight—we'll see you later," I broke in, and they both looked up, startled, called all the way back from the Aegean Sea.

They murmured "Goodnight" and we turned to leave. I don't know what made me do it then, but I turned at the door and grinned at them. "What happened to the tiger? Trade him in for Ulysses?"

"Of course not." It was Oglix who answered, unsmiling. "The tiger's asleep. Over there." And she waved toward the corner of the room. And then they both stared until, feeling a little silly and uncomfortable and apologetic, I turned and left the room.

So, we went along with the tiger after that. If Sandy wanted a tiger, all right. (Besides, as Mary pointed out, these things pass. The tiger would be with us for a little while, and then Sandy would find something else. Maybe a girl. Maybe a fairy . . . fairies are all right, he was only three. . . .)

And then the sad time came to leave—the two weeks had passed impossibly fast—and we stood around the driveway, getting ready to go and hating to. We kissed all around and started getting into the car. Oglix held Sandy close for a moment and they looked into each other's eyes and

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she said, "Want to leave the tiger with me for a while, love?"

And he answered back, unsmiling, "No. I'm going to need him."

And they looked at each other for a long moment, understanding one another in a way we never could. It always seems to skip a generation....

So, the trip back. Uneventful. Sandy and the tiger slept in the back seat most of the way down, and we only had to stop once.

We finally pulled up in the alley in back of the house and bundled Sandy inside and to bed. I thought he was fast asleep, but he stirred and mumbled "Goodnight" and then he said, sleepily, "Be sure and leave the window open so the tiger can get in."

So I opened the window and tiptoed out, and when we looked in on him later he was curled up with his arms around something and smiling in his sleep.

We finished unpacking and fell into bed, feeling as if we'd never been away, as if nothing had changed.

But it had.

While we were gone, the Hadleys had moved in. Next door.

The Hadleys announced themselves at five in the morning. That's right. Five. First there was a loud scream and a scuttling sound and a door slamming and a woman's voice, high up in the nasal register, yelling, "Ponnsey, you come back chere! You come back chere and get a whuppin'!"

There was an inarticulate howl that sounded like nothing human, a slap, a slam of a screen door and, for a moment, silence. Then the screen door slammed again, "Ponnsey!" rang out in the air, and that was the end of sleep for *that* morning. For me, at least. The back of Mary's head had that smug look on it that says, "It's your turn this morning . . . dear."

I can't fight it. I got out of bed, brewed some coffee, took a bennie and waited. In around twenty minutes things came into focus, and everything was all right. But, still, there's something *immoral* about being up and clear-eyed and alert at five thirty in the morning. It's not *decent.*

There was some more banging outside, a few screams, a long drawn out "Ponnnnnsey!" again.

What the hell. As I sat there, the happy realization dawned on me that what I was hearing must be the new neighbours. Place next door had been empty when we'd left, and we'd liked it that way, having seen some of the prospective tenants the landlord had led in on inspection tours. But—this was Santa Monica, and Santa Monica's never exactly taken a prize for impressive physical types.

When I got to the door, though, and *saw* Ponnsey . . . ever had a spider run unexpectedly over your hand? It was a tossup be-

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tween going back into the house and getting the flit gun, stepping on him, or—well, the strongest feeling was an urge to take him between your thumbnails and *snip*. He was too big for that, but you felt you could do it.

Ponnsey, the new little darling in the next-door house, was three feet tall. His color was near that of an unhealthy mushroom, and his eyes were set so closely together that, seen from the side, he looked like a Partch cartoon. Or a flounder.

And Ponnsey scuttled. That's the only word for it. It was a crabwise hop and a skip that covered ground amazingly fast, and it looked like a big spider, out there under the trees.

Ponnsey stopped at the end of the line of bushes, feeling my stare on him. He stared back. But, even then, it wasn't a little boy's way of staring. He stood sideways, hunched, his chin tucked into his shoulder, and the little colorless eyes squinched around at me. He stood there for a moment and then scuttled in my direction. Involuntarily, I stepped back behind the screen door, and he veered at the last minute and went into his own house, still in that sidewise scrabbling motion.

Jesus, I thought to myself, and turned to get another cup of coffee. Damned near yelled, then, because as I turned I almost stumbled over Sandy. He'd come up beside me, and I don't know how long he'd been standing there, looking.

His hand slid into mine, *reassuringly.* "What's the matter, daddy?"

I pulled myself together. "Nothing, boyboy. Nothing," I said. "Come on, now—let's get some breakfast."

He came along and ate everything on his plate, saying nothing until after he polished off his seconds of bacon. Then he looked across the table at me and his hand came out, again in an oddly reassuring gesture.

"Don't you worry, daddy," he said. "Everything's going to be all right."

"What are you talking about?" I said.

He slid off the chair, his eyes serious, and went back into the bedroom.

"So, all right," I said to the kitchen. "So I won't worry. There's nothing to worry *about.*"

But then there was more screaming and howling from the house next door, and banging, and —singing. Loud-volume radio-type singing. With guitars, yodels, nasal tones and all. And it had the feeling about it that it wasn't a sometime thing, that this was the way life *was* in the house next door.

So . . . worry? *Me?* In a year when there were *no* other apartments to be had, a year not too

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long back when all the landlords wore smug little smiles that implied you should tug at your forelock and say *Thank you, thank you* when you paid the rent? *Worry?*

"Everything's going to be all right, daddy," came an echo from the bedroom.

I finished doing whatever it is that one has to do to get ready to go out in the morning, and left the house with Sandy's reassurance in my ears.

That was when I saw the rest of the Hadley family.

Ponnsey was a pale blur under some bushes at the end of the court. His mother was on the porch, waving a rag and screaming at him. Ponnsey couldn't have gotten his looks from her. *Her* eyes were on the *side* of her head. I was afraid to meet the father. There was an old, indeterminate-looking sort of man at the side of the house, dressed in yellowish long underwear, blowing his nose on the grass. Uncle Jed (we got the names later) was sitting on the porch rail, straw cowboy hat, jeans, bent raptly over a comic book. It took him all day to get through one, but then he moved his lips. Even when he wasn't reading, he moved his lips. And—dessert—Ponnsey's father appeared in the doorway. That's where Ponnsey got his looks from. It looked like Ponnsey, only king-size. Nice. Very nice.

I started moving *my* lips.

"Heeyowdy!" rang from the porch. Not Howdy. Heeyowdy. Texas. (Or, as the wags have had it lately, Baja Oklahoma.) But—definitely—Texas.

And Ponnsey's father, Jawn, came a-loping down the steps to greet me. We exchanged limited pleasantries and, before I could tear myself away, Jawn said, with a look that was almost pleading but truculent at the same time, "I hope, I do hope we won't have any trouble chere."

"Trouble?"

"Yar." Jawn looked toward the end of the court, where the bushes were moving.

"No telling how many places we had to leave in the past two years. Came out chere. Hope there ain't no trouble . . ." He gestured toward the bushes and leaned forward confidentially. "Ponnsey, you know. Ain't a *natural* child, they say. Shoot, they ain't never *proved* none of it, but—"

A yowl came from the bushes and a cat backed out slowly, every hair on its body standing out straight and stiff. A small pale gray hand reached out for it, and the animal spat, jumped straight up in the air and disappeared over the fence, its yowls fading behind it.

"Yar," Jawn said again. "Funny thing about Ponnsey and animals. They don't seem to take to him." He looked at me. "All Ponnsey

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wants to do is *squeeze* 'em a little, just wants to see how they're made," he said, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. "Ain't nothing not natural in that, is they? Well—" he broke off—"time for morning grits. Proud to meet you, friend."

He moved back into the house and I stood there for a moment, a grin pasted on my face. Then I started moving down the walk toward the gate. The bushes parted as I passed by, and the little gray spider face of Ponnsey stared out at me. I drew my hand back involuntarily, and the branches closed over the face again and there was only a scuttling sound that faded down the runway behind the bushes.

Well, shortly after that, things started happening in the court. The little girl across the way came in crying, saying Faeryanna had disappeared. "And Ponnsey did it," she wailed. "He just took her and he . . . and he cut-her-all-up-in-little-pieces!"

It took a brand new bright red tricycle and two weeks to get her over it. And then—Jimeagle left the little boy who lived two houses down.

I heard the dialogue coming from Sandy's room.

Sandy was saying, "—and *then* what happened?" and I smiled, thinking he was playing one of his interminable games with the tiger. But the voice of the two-houses-down little boy answered, the tears trembling somewhere just beneath the surface.

"And then—and then Jimeagle said he was going away, somewhere far away, and he—he was never going to come back, ever, ever again."

Some mumbling followed, and I couldn't catch anything until Sandy's voice rose again.

"But, we *can't*—"

"You gotta!"

Silence for a moment. Then, "Well, we'll see. . . ."

The door opened and the little boy came out, starting in surprise as he saw me standing there. He ducked his head and mumbled "Excuse me. . . ." and bolted out of the door past me. Sandy came out a little while after, said "Hi, daddy" and followed the little boy without a backward glance.

After that, things *really* started happening around the court.

The house farthest down caught fire one night and burned to the ground. Luckily, the people who lived there had been out to the movies and were just coming home when the fire broke out. The wife's screams when she saw the flames brought us all boiling out of our houses, but there was nothing we could do but stand around and look on helplessly.

It was a fierce blaze, burning unbelievably fast, and the house was cinders long before the first fire engine even got there.

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The wife kept screaming all the time and pointing to the house while her husband tried to calm her down. When she finally simmered down enough to make sense . . . well, she might as well have remained hysterical, because all they could get out of her was "I *saw* it, I saw something running away behind the house. I saw it!"

Then she would break down, sobbing, and they'd have to get her calm again. When they pressed her, though, she said that she'd been excited and hadn't seen anything, and that was that.

But she told Mary, later, and Mary told me. The woman had said that she'd seen something scuttling away from the house just as they'd pulled up. Something gray, pale in the moonlight, something that ran sideways and all hunched over, about three feet tall. But, as she told Mary, who'd believe a story like that and, besides, what can you see at one in the morning? I mean, see, and be really *sure*?

They never did find any signs of arson, and the cause of the fire remained unknown. But the woman's words touched off a nagging sense of unrest that had been with me since the night of the fire, and I realized what had bothered me. With all the excitement, all the banging of doors and shouts and lights springing on, people all milling around . . . with all of that, the Hadley house had remained dark and silent. But, again, what does that prove? In all that excitement, who can be sure what happened, what one saw or didn't see?

Things were quiet for a week after that. Then it started, all over again. Toys wound up broken. Not just broken: pulverized, as if they'd been taken up to some great height and *dashed* to the ground. Kids break toys, sure, and they do some pretty impossible things, but—to take this unbreakable plastic and leave it in bite-size pieces . . .

And windows shattered when there was no one around. Little fires started in unlikely places. The landlord broke his leg, tripping over the garden hose that hadn't been there the moment before he put his foot down.

Even the grass started turning brown and dying. And, always, nothing to put a finger on, nothing to pinpoint the source of trouble. Scuttling sounds in the night, sure—but it could have been cats, could have been anything. A sense of close-set eyes *watching*, squinching up in glee . . . again, what can you prove? What could you come out with, hold it up in a cold, clear light, and say, "*This* is what's happening"?

Nothing. Nothing but real unhappy neighbours.

Everybody talked about mov-

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ing out, but there was no place to move to, remember. And the things kept on happening.

Until the showdown.

There came a scream from outside one day, and I heard Sandy's voice raised in anger. Now, normally, no one would pay attention to it. Since Ponnsey's moving in, screams and angry shouts were an everyday thing. But, just as you can tell when a child is really crying or merely faking it, so it is with shouts. And Sandy's shout had real anger in it.

There was the sound of a blow and another scream. I went to the door. Ponnsey was lying on the ground, his arms over his face, screaming. Sandy was on the red tricycle, poised over him, saying, "You say that once more and I'll run all *over* you again!"

Ponnsey hunched up. His little close-together eyes had something in them that made *my* blood run cold, but Sandy didn't seem to mind it.

Ponnsey mumbled to himself and Sandy said, "You do, you do anything to my house and I'll get the tiger after you, you hear?"

Ponnsey scrambled to his feet and scuttled toward his house. He turned around as he reached the safety of the screen door and made a gesture with his scrawny fist. "I ain't afraid of your old tiger," he said, and hurriedly slammed the screen door as Sandy made a motion with the tricycle.

Sandy sat there for a moment and then wheeled the tricycle around. As he did, he saw me standing there in the doorway. A strange look came on his face, but it disappeared so swiftly that I may have imagined it. He grinned and waved "Hi, daddy!" at me, and then started wheeling the tricycle around the lawn as if nothing had happened.

The wastebasket in the kitchen caught fire later that afternoon. I put it out, shouting at Mary for dumping the ashtrays without checking for burning cigarettes. She said *I'd* been writing in the the kitchen all afternoon, that she hadn't been *near* an ashtray, and that I was the one who'd goofed. Sandy appeared in the doorway in all the confusion.

"What happened?" he asked, his eyes round.

"Nothing, boyboy. Go out and play."

His eyes fell on the wastebasket and, ignoring me, he walked over to it. He looked at it for a long time. Then he looked at me. "OK, daddy," he said. He looked at the wastebasket again. "*OK.*" And he nodded his head in a strangely *adult* way, and went out.

Nothing else happened that day. Sandy was in a funny mood at dinner, distant, answering questions absentmindedly. "I'm *listening*," he said at one point, and I chalked it all up to a mood, and

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let it pass. He came out of it and we played after dinner, roughhousing on the floor, playing shoot-the-cowboy, laughing as I chased him, trying to get his pajamas on.

But after I'd read him his story and tucked him in bed, I heard whispering coming from his room. And it didn't have the sound of play-whispering. It went on for a long time. There'd be a space of quiet after I yelled in a go-to-*sleep*-now! warning, and then the urgent whispering would start again, as if Sandy were trying to convince someone of something.

Patches drifted out: ". . . I don't care if he *is* a polterguy—whatever you said he was. . . . going to do something to *us* now. . . . wastebasket . . . after us . . . wouldn't want that, would you?"

I finally got up and went in to enforce the silence ruling, but Sandy was lying back on the pillows, looking innocent, saying, "I *was* keeping quiet, daddy. Resting." So I kissed him goodnight again and went back to my book.

But the words wouldn't make sense and I finally gave it up as a bad job and went to bed. I knew there'd be no sleep, but there must have been—with dreams—because the next thing I knew, it was morning and Mary was leaning over me with a worried look on her face and the sheets were drenched clear through and she was saying she'd tried to wake me and couldn't and was it the malaria again?

I lied and said it was and got up, took a shower and got ready for breakfast, feeling as if I'd been turned inside out.

Patches of the dream drifted in and out of my mind. Crazy things. Like a baby tiger that was no longer a baby—and no longer quite a tiger, either. Like Sandy standing somewhere on a hill, arms raised high, singing something in a voice strangely *deep* for a little boy. And other voices, equally strange and deep and—echoing—answering back. And Sandy's voice—

—saying "Hi, daddy!" as he came in and sat down at the breakfast table. He gave me a look, as if there were some secret we shared—some unfunny secret, and, much as I tried to remember the rest of the dream, it got jumbled and faded away until it was completely gone, and Sandy was sitting there with a relieved look on his face. Then—

"Ponnsey! Ponnsey, you come chere now, you hear?" rang through the court.

Sandy looked at me and then bent down to his oatmeal.

"Ponnsey! I'm gonna whup you if you don't come . . ." the voice screamed. There was the sound of scuffling outside, a sort of whine and scream rolled into one, and—"Come outa them bushes, you little devil, I'm gonna

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whup you to a inch!" Determined footsteps outside, a reluctant yell, and the screen door slamming.

What can I say? That I felt relief? Chagrin? That maybe I expected Ponnsey *wouldn't* be around this morning? No. It was chagrin. A kind of hopeless chagrin, because it's pretty wild to expect someone to disappear in the morning on the strength of a half-remembered dream, and it looked as if the Hadleys would be neighbours for a long time, and if you think *that* makes for a happy feeling, you're out of your mind.

Yeah, it was chagrin. What *did* I expect? Even from a tiger.

And then Sandy was around the table, his hand sliding into mine and squeezing, eyes serious on me.

"Don't worry, daddy—it'll be all *right*."

All right. So I'm crazy. But I felt a *relief* spreading over me, and the day seemed to get sunny all of a sudden, even though the sound of voices and guitars and nasal singing and screaming still filtered through the screen door.

And things started *happening*, over at the Hadleys'. Ponnsey fell down and broke his arm, and this kept him inside the house. The first day, two windows were broken over there.

Uncle Jed blew his nose on the grass and missed.

A fire started, and all Uncle Jed's comic books were burned up, although nothing else was touched.

The bathtub overflowed and ruined the nice linoleum the Hadleys had in the livingroom.

Two weeks later, there was a bustle in the alley outside. The Hadleys were a-lopin' back and forth and loading all their treasures on a rickety open trailer. It was pretty noisy. But, it was a *good* kind of noise.

Finally, the last knot was tied, the last plaster statuette tucked into place, and they piled in, grumbling and grimacing. Something about California.

The last sight we had of the Hadleys was the back of the trailer as it jiggled on broken springs down the alley, the 24-inch TV set bouncing precariously on top of the whole bloody load.

I went out and stood in the alley, savoring the moment, and in a little while I felt a small hand slipping into mine.

"See, Daddy? Told you not to worry." Sandy grinned up at me and I grinned back down at him and we just stood there for a while, letting the warm waves wash around us.

"You see," Sandy said as we walked back to the house, "you just gotta fight fire with fire, daddy."

I started to laugh and he looked up, frowning. "I mean it. We've got some on *our* side, too!"

And then he was skipping up

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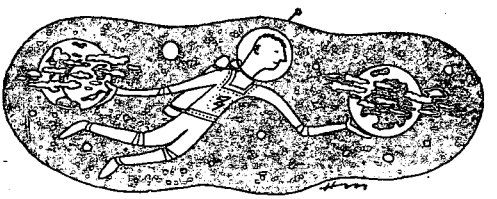
the steps ahead of me and when I got into the house he was back in his room, playing with his toys as if nothing had happened.

Well, sir, everything's OK now. There's a pretty big job of redecorating to be done on the place next door, so it's still vacant, but we don't have to worry about the next tenants who move in. Sandy'll pass on them to make sure they're OK. We haven't a thing to worry about—so long as he's still the right age for tigers.



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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

IN ACCORD WITH THE CURRENT belief of many hardcover publishers that s.f. sells better if you don't tell the customer precisely what he's getting, Clifton Fadiman's FANTASIA MATHEMATICA (Simon & Schuster, $4.95) has carefully *not* been publicized as a science-fantasy anthology. But to this limited and already converted audience, I can safely divulge its secret without hurting sales: It *is* a collection of science fiction and fantasy, and one of the best ever published.

It is subtitled "a set of stories, together with a group of oddments and diversions, all drawn from the universe of mathematics" —a description which happily allows for great variety within a unified pattern. There is a little "realistic" fiction here, notably Aldous Huxley's splendid *Young Archimedes;* excerpts from longer works by writers as diverse as Cabell, Koestler and Plato; a grand gallimaufry of limericks, anecdotes, fables, epigrams and other miscellanea mathematica; and 16 short stories of mathematical imagination, mostly from the s.f. magazines (and especially from F&SF). Some of the shorts, such as Heinlein's *—And He Built a Crooked House* or Clarke's *Superiority,* you've doubtless read before; but they'll seem even better in this nicely patterned context. Others will come as delightful surprises: Willy Ley's translation of a Kurd Lasswitz caprice hitherto unknown in English, Edward Page Mitchell's astonishingly lively *The Tachypomp* (from *Scribner's,* 1873!) and a William Hazlett Upson *SEP* story adroitly involving A. Botts with a Moebius strip.

This is a volume that might have been edited specifically for the readers of F&SF. If you buy only one anthology this year, make it this one (yes: even at the expense of THE BEST FROM F&SF: 7TH SERIES).

T. E. Dikty's THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 9TH SERIES (Advent, $3.50) is less than accurately titled. The longest "novel" would fill about 40 pages of this magazine; and if this assembly of the tedious, trite and ill-reasoned represents the "best" of recent s.f. (selections run from December, 1956 to September, 1957), we—editors, writers and readers alike—might as well give

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up. To be sure, there is a firstrate novelet by Poul Anderson (from *Astounding*) and good (if far from "best") shorts by Carol Emshwiller, Chad Oliver and Eric Frank Russell; but these hardly amount to $3.50 worth of pleasure. Mr. Dikty's essay on *The S.-F. Year* adduces statistics from some alternate continuum; but Earl Kemp's *The S.-F. Book Index* (covering both 1956 and 1957 in England and America) is valuable enough to commend the book, perhaps, to scholars and librarians.

Donald A. Wollheim's MEN ON THE MOON (Ace, 35¢) is a very short anthology of 5 stories (by Chandler, Fyfe, Gallun, Leinster and Robinson) about the early days of lunar exploration—not a bad lot, if mostly familiar from other reprintings. The same Double-Book includes Leinster's realistically gimmicked but poorly written CITY ON THE MOON (1957).

Theological science fiction to date has been almost entirely Catholic. This is understandable enough when the authors themselves are Catholics, whether Anglican like C. S. Lewis or Roman like Walter M. Miller, Jr. and me; but even Protestant and agnostic authors – notably Philip José Farmer and James Blish—seem fascinated by the problems involved in moving the Church's theological dilemmas into space.

The danger of posing so strictly sectarian a problem as does Blish in A CASE OF CONSCIENCE (Ballantine, 35¢) is that the Catholic reader will be over-conscious of inaccuracies and inadequacies, while the non-Catholic will simply wonder what all the shootin's fer.

The first portion of this book was an *If* novella in 1953, and in many respects an admirable one. The planet of Lithia and the intelligent lizard-marsupial Lithians are brought to life with a detailed care comparable to any creation of Hal Clement's, and the Jesuit explorer-biologist Ruiz-Sanchez is a credible and moving figure, if the terrifying conclusion he reaches as to the true nature of Lithia seems far from inescapable.

But when the expanded book returns to Earth for its second and longer section, it loses focus and impact. It wanders about among assorted subplots and submotifs, loses sight of Ruiz-Sanchez and his conscience for long stretches, and comes back only to show him in errors of religious education which no Jesuit could possibly fall into. All this builds to an ending intended to be at least ambivalent (if not trivalent), but seeming merely chaotic.

Blish's VOR (Avon, 35¢), based on a short story in *Thrilling Wonder* (1949) by Blish and Damon Knight, is less ambitious

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but more successful—indeed the most satisfactory, as a whole, of Blish's books to date. This is a simple enough Invasion-from-Outer-Space tale; but it's given distinction by the unusual yet credible nature of the invading monster and his mission, by the plausible ingenuity of the scientific attempts to communicate with him, to analyze him and eventually to destroy him, and by the nice balance between these macrocosmic events and the microcosmic study of an embittered and disintegrating marriage.

Other recent s.f. novels:

THE BLUE BARBARIANS, by Stanton Coblentz (Avalon, $2.75). Period piece from *Amazing Quarterly,* 1931. Routine adventure, no science, and some mildly agreeable satire in our first contact with Venus.

INVISIBLE BARRIERS, by David Osborne (Avalon, $2.75). 1957 *If* novel attacking a future of isolationism and television, ridiculously inept in both its extrapolation and its plotting.

INVADERS FROM EARTH, by Robert Silverberg (Ace, 35¢). Starts off as above-average Pohl-Kornbluth derivative, as public relations agency takes on job of persuading Earth it should wipe out the harmless, but economically inconvenient natives of Ganymede; collapses utterly as opportunist hero Finds His Soul and Saves All. Unjelled novel, but marked by Silverberg's characteristic ease in filling in convincing small future details. Double-Book contains David Grinnell's uneven but entertaining ACROSS TIME (1957).

It's exactly 4 years since a short story by Alfred Bester appeared here (or, I think, in any s.f. magazine); but F&SF readers will surely remember him as one of the most dazzling authors we've ever had the happiness of presenting—a virtuoso of style, technique and thinking, with the ability to tell one hell of a space-yarn while infusing science-fictional themes with the deeper psychological values of myth.

STARBURST (Signet, 35¢) is the first collection of Bester stories, and one of the most notable single-author collections ever published in our field. Chronologically, the stories range from the classic *Adam and No Eve* (*Astounding,* 1941) to 2 new unpublished short-shorts; most are from Bester's lustrous lustrum of 1950-1954. Of the 11 stories, 5 appeared here; those and 3 others have been anthologized. But for once, extensive previous reprinting should be no deterrent. Bester stories reread magnificently (I found myself absorbedly rereading tales that I already knew almost by heart); and they sparkle even more brilliantly when strung together thus than when they shone in duller settings. As an

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editor of BEST's, I must acknowledge what is even Bester: this may well be the Book of the Year.

Fresco, the quarterly magazine of the University of Detroit, has accomplished, so far as I know, something unique in university publishing by devoting an entire issue to serious study of a writer of pulp-fantasy. *Fresco's* HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM, edited by Steve Eisner, is a collection of 10 short essays, plus a skeletal but good bibliography and a reprinting of Lovecraft's own *The Music of Erich Zann*. Of outstanding interest are Fritz Leiber's moving account of his brief epistolary friendship with H.P.L., David H. Keller's arguable but provocative attempt at a medico-psychiatric approach to the author, and Joseph Payne Brennan's persuasive heresy that the tales of the Cthulhu Mythos do not represent Lovecraft at his best. A few copies are available—and free!—to members of the non-University public; send your request to *Fresco*, Tower Court, University of Detroit, 4001 W. McNichols Road, Detroit 21.

Solomon Grundy
Walked on Monday
Rode on Tuesday
Motored Wednesday
Planed on Thursday
Rocketed Friday
Spaceship Saturday
Time Machine Sunday
Where is the end for
Solomon Grundy?

Which is only one of 45 enchanting entries in THE SPACE CHILD'S MOTHER GOOSE, verses by Frederick Winsor, illustrations by Marian Perry (S&S, $2.50). You may recall these coruscant caprices in the *Atlantic* starting in late 1956; they seem even better in book form, especially the pictures, which were apparently planned for this format rather than magazine pages. For the widest public, the imaginative humor here may be a trifle special and the vocabulary excessive (surely never were so many words used in so few lines!); but this, like the Fadiman collection, seems a volume especially created for the F&SF reader (may his tribe increase).

Also specifically for you: Charles Addams' NIGHTCRAWLERS (Simon & Schuster, $3.95), noted here belatedly—it should have been on our Best of 1957 list—as reassuring evidence that the Master of the Macabre grows even more excellently ghoulish year by year; and Walt Kelly's THE POGO SUNDAY PARADE (Simon & Schuster, $1), a notable volume even by the standards of the Okefenokee Swamp since it contains the episode of Albert and the octopus and the incident in which Mr. Bear plays Santa

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Claus—perhaps history's longest buildup to a shatteringly shaggy tagline. Another belated note: 1957's POSITIVELY POGO (Simon & Schuster, $1) includes one of the few Pogo sequences verging on s.f., in which Pogo and Mouse are received as Martian entrants in the Olympic Games.

Assorted non-fiction of fantasy or s.f. interest:

WHEN WENDY GREW UP, by J. M. Barrie (Dutton, $2). First publication of "an afterthought" to PETER PAN: a final scene performed only once (in 1908). Nice rounding off of the fantasy theme, with a certain bite underneath the sweetness.

THE CASE FOR PSYCHIC SURVIVAL, by Hereward Carrington (Citadel, $3.50). Brief record of a new departure in psychic research: the use of psychological personality tests (word association, Rohrschach, etc.) on medium Eileen Garrett and her control Uvani, to determine whether the "spirit" is a separate entity. Inconclusive but interesting.

LEGENDS OF THE NEW ENGLAND COAST, by Edward Rowe Snow (Dodd, Mead, $4). Mermaids, devils, witches, highlighted by a great poltergeist case in 1682 and a curious tale of treasure and apparitions in 1860, all told with Snow's usual quiet charm.

ANIMAL LEGENDS, by Maurice Burton (Coward-McCann, $4.95). Burton is not in a class with Willy Ley or Richard Carrington as either a writer or a thinker; but despite a certain will-to-believe, he has interesting material on such possible fantasies as sea serpents and snowmen and such fascinatingly improbable facts as jumping snakes and anting birds. Fine illustrations by Georg T. Hartmann.

WATER UNLIMITED, by Kenneth Roberts (Doubleday, $3.95). Whatever you think of Mr. Roberts' passion for Henry Gross and his dowsing rod, you should enjoy this posthumous book as a splendid display of joyously virulent abuse, directed with enviable vigor at professors, welldiggers, all other dowsers, J. B. Rhine and Martin Gardner.

THE FLYING SAUCER REVIEW'S WORLD ROUNDUP OF UFO SIGHTINGS AND EVENTS, edited by the Hon. Brinsley le Poer Trench (Citadel, $3.75). What is one to make of a book that can say, "A large circular object—similar in appearance to one of the larger stars—flew soundlessly across the sky at midnight on March 21"? This vague and undocumented list of "sightings and events" from November, 1955 to December, 1957 contains one or two interesting oddments (especially a Swedish incident, p. 96) and at least serves as evidence that UFOria has spread worldwide.

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In a culture as notably unweaned as ours, it is regrettable that we have no word at once proper and precise for Man's field of fetichism. The word teat *is now either vulgar or veterinarian; the meaning of* pap *is no longer palpable, and* dug *is dug only by scholars. We are forced to use* breast, *essentially a euphemism and originally meaning the entire pectoral region. In linguistic and anatomical strictness, a woman has a breast, or a pair of teats; we speak of a bosom or a pair of breasts. But euphemism insidiously creeps; and by now even the prissy* breast *is, in its turn, slowly being replaced by* bosom. *Lexicographers have not yet noted this usage, but it is widespread. I have known a jutting girl to speak proudly of her "bosoms," thereby raising the interesting expectation that—But I am getting ahead of Mr. Davidson's story.*

Great Is Diana

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

"WHENEVER THE SEXES SEPARATE, at a party like this, I mean, after dinner," Jim Lucas said, "I keep feeling we ought to have walnuts and port and say *'Gempmun, the Queen!'* like in the old English novels."

"Naa, you don't want any *port*," Don Slezak, who was the host, said, opening the little bar, "What you want—"

Fred Bishop, who had taken a cigar out of his pocket, put it back. "Speaking of the old English," he began. But Don didn't want to speak of the old English.

"I want you try this," he said. "It's something I invented myself. Doesn't even have a name yet." He produced a bottle and a jug and ice and glasses. Jim looked interested; Fred, resigned. "It's really a very simple little drink," Don observed, pouring. "You take white rum—any good white rum —and cider. But it's got to be *real* cider. None of this pasteurized apple juice that they allow them to sell nowadays as cider. So much of this . . . so much of that. Drink up."

They drank. "Not bad at all. In fact," Fred smacked his lips, "very good. Strange, how fashions in drink change. Rum was It until gin came in; then whisky. Now,

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in the seventeen hundreds . . ."

Don got up and noisily prepared three more rum-and-ciders. "Ah," he said, quaffing, "it goes down like mother's milk, doesn't it." Jim put his glass down empty with a clatter. Don promptly made more.

"Mother's milk," Jim said. He was reflective. "Talk about fashions in *drink* . . . dextrose, maltose, corn syrup, and what the hell else they put into the babies nowadays. Howcome the women aren't born flat-chested, explain me *that*, Mr. Bishop?"

Fred smiled blandly. "Proves there's nothing *to* this evolution nonsense, doesn't it. Particularly after that sordid Piltdown business . . ."

Don Slezak poured himself another. "Got to go a little bit easy on the cider," he said. "Rum, you can get rum anywhere, but real cider . . . That's a *revolting* idea!" he exclaimed, struck by a delayed thought. "Flat-chested. Ugh."

Jim said, defensively, that it would serve the women right. "Dextrose, maltose, corn syrup. No wonder the kids nowadays are going to Hell in a hotrod. They're rotten with chemicals before they can even *walk!*"

"The poor kids." Don choked down a sob. Jim waved his glass.

"Another thing. Besides that, Nature *meant* women to nurse their babies. Nature meant them to have *twins*. 'Sobvious. Or else they'd just have *one*. In the middle. Like a cyclops or something. And how many women do *you* know or do *I* know, who have twins? Precious damn few, let *me* tell you. . . . Oh, Margaret Sanger has a lot to answer for," he said, darkly.

Don smirked. "Spotted the flaw in *that* argument right away. According to *you*, cows should have quadruplets." He began to laugh, then to cough. Jim's face fell. Fred Bishop at once put his cigar back again.

"Curious you should bring that up. The late Alexander Graham Bell passed the latter years of his life developing a breed of sheep which would produce quadruplets. In order for the ewes to be able to nourish these multiple births they had to possess four functioning teats instead of the usual two."

Don squirmed. "I wish you'd pronounce that word as it's spelled," he said. "It sounds so *vul*gar when you rhyme it with *'pits.'*"

Jim crunched a piece of ice, nodded his head slowly. Then he spat out the pieces. "Just occurred to me: Doesn't something like that sometimes occur in women? *'Polymam-'* something? Once knew a woman who was a custom brassiere-maker, and she claimed that—"

Fred waved his arm. "All in

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good time," he said. "In the seventeen hundreds—"

A dreamy look had come into Don's eyes. "Suppose a fellow was one of these whatdayacallits? a breast-fetichist." He got the latter word out with some difficulty. "Why, he'd go *crazy*—"

"Why don't you mix up another round, Don?" Fred suggested, craftily. "Jim could help you. And I will tell you about the interesting career of Mr. Henry Taylor, who was, in a way, an example of what Aldous Huxley calls the glorious eccentrics who enliven every age by their presence."

Mr. Henry Taylor [Fred continued] was an Englishman, which is a thing glorious enough in itself. He was not, even by our foolish modern standards, too much of an eccentric; which is an argument in favor of free will over heredity. His grandfather, Mr. Fulke Taylor, in unsolicited response to the controversies between the Houses of Hanover and Stuart, had managed to plague both—and the Houses of Parliament as well—with genealogical pamphlets he had written in favor of the claims (which existed only in his own mind) of a distant, distaff branch of the Tudors. He also willed a sum of money to be used in translating the works of Dryden into the Cornish language. The task was duly carried out by a prolific and penniless clergyman named Pendragon, or Pendennis, or Pen-something; it did much to prevent the extinction of the latter's family, but had, alas, no such effect upon the Cornish language.

Trevelyan Taylor, Henry's father, was much taken up—you will recall this was in the seventeen hundreds—with what he called *"These new and wonderful Discoveries"*: meaning the efforts of Robert Bakewell and the brothers Bates in the recently developed science of selective breeding. *"Previously,"* wrote Trevelyan Taylor, *"Animal Husbandry was left entirely to the animals themselves. We shall alter that."*

Others might inbreed, crossbreed, linebreed, and outbreed in the interest of larger udders or leaner bacon; old Trevelyan spent thirty devoted years in the exclusive purpose of developing a strain of white sheep with black tails. There has seldom been a longer experiment in the realm of pure science, but after the old man's death the whole flock (known locally as Taylor's Tails) was sold to an unimaginative and pre-Mendelian drover named Huggins, thus becoming history. And mutton.

The flock, if it produced no profit, at least paid for itself, and its owner had spent little on other things. Henry Taylor, who had enjoyed a comfortable allowance,

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now found himself with an even more comfortable income. He turned ancestral home and estate over to his younger brother, Laurence (later, first Baron Osterwold), and set forth on his travels. London saw him no more—"*London, where I have passed so much of my youth,*" as he wrote in a letter to his brother, "*in profligate Courses as a Rake and a Deist.*" These two terms are, of course, not necessarily synonymous.

Henry Taylor crossed over to the continent with his carriage, his horses, his valet, clothes, commode, dressing case, and toilet articles. No-one had yet begun to vulcanize or galvanize or do whatever it is to rubber which is done, but he had a portable, collapsible sailcloth bath—all quite in the Grand Tradition of the English Milord. Throughout all the years that he continued his letters—throughout, at least, all of the European and part of the Asiatic term of his travels—he insisted that his tour was for educational purposes.

"*I devote myself,*" he wrote, "*to the study of those Institutions of which I count myself best qualified to judge. I leave to others the Governance and Politick of Nations, and their Laws and Moral Philosophies. My Inquiries —empirick, all—are directed towards their Food, their Drink, their Tobacco, and their Women.* Especially *their Women! Glorious Creatures, all, of whatsoever Nation. I love them all and I love every Part of them, Tresses, Eyes, Cheeks, Lips, Necks, Napes, Arms, Bosoms . . .*

"*Why do Women cloack their lovely Bosoms, Brother?*" he demands to know. "*Why conceal their Primest Parts? So much better to reveal them pridefully, as do the Females in the Isles of Spice. . . . I desire you'll send* [he adds] *by next vessel to stop at Leghorn, 6 lbs. fine Rappee Snuff and 4 cases Holland Gin.*"

Taylor passed leisurely through France, the Low Countries, various German States, Denmark, Poland, Austria, Venice, Lombardy, Modena, Tuscany, the Papal Dominions, the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies, and—crossing the Adriatic—entered the Turkish hegemonies in Europe by way of Albania . . . the tobacco was much better than in Italy, but he complained against the eternal sherbets of the Turks, who were, he said, in the manner of not offering strong waters to their guests, "*no better than the Methodies or other dehydrated Sectarians.*" He was not overpleased with the Greek practice of putting resin in their wine, and noted that "*they eat much Mutton and little Beef and drink a poor sort of Spirits called Rockee.*" He liked their curdled milk, however, and —of course—their women.

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"The Men here wear Skirts," Henry Taylor says, *"and the Women wear Pantalones. . . . I have made diligent Inquiry and learned that this unnatural Reversal doth not obtain in* all *Matters domestick, however."* He cites details to support this last statement.

There is a picture of him done at this time by an itinerant Italian painter of miniatures. It shows a well-made man in his thirties, dressed in the English styles of the year of Taylor's departure, with a line of whisker curling down his jaw; clean-shaven chin and upper-lip, and a rather full mouth. He began to learn Turkish and the Romaic, or vernacular Greek, to sit cross-legged and to suck at a hookah, to like the tiny cups of black and syrupy coffee, and—eventually—to dispense with an interpreter. He spoke face to face with the pasha of each district he passed. He rather liked the Turks.

"There is among them none of this Hypocritical Nonsense, as with us, of having One Wife, to whom we are eternally yoked unless we care to display our Horns and our Money to the House of Lords." He reports a conversation he had with *"a Black Eunuch in Adrianople. I asked him quite Boldly if he were not sensible of his Great Loss, and he pointed to an Ass which was grazing nearby and said with a Laugh—"* But I really cannot repeat what he said.

Taylor said he *"admired his Wit, but was not happy at the aptness of his Analogy."*

From the Balkans he went on to Asia Minor, where he made a closer acquaintance of the famous Circassian women—the raising and the sale of whom was seemingly the chief business of their native hills. He pauses in his flow of metaphors to ask a question. *"If I compare the Breasts of the Turkish Women to full Moons, with what shall I compare those glorious Features possessed by the Circassians? I would liken them to the warm Sun, were the Sun Twins."*

"Polymastial" Jim exclaimed. He smiled happily. Fred blinked, Don said, "Huh?"

"Not *'polymam-'* something, but polymastia: 'Having many breasts.' Just now remembered. Came across it once, in a dictionary."

"Just like that, huh?" Don asked. "Were you considering becoming a latter-day A. G. Bell with the human race instead of sheep?"

"Go on, Fred," Jim said, hastily. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

Taylor's next letter [Fred continued, after a very slight pause] was dated more than a year later, from Jerusalem. He had conceived a desire to visit the more

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remote regions of Western Asia Minor, eventually heading for the coast, whence he hoped to visit certain of the Grecian islands. As large areas were impassable to his carriage, he was obliged to hire mules. He gives a description, as usual, of the nature of the country and people, but without his usual lively humor. Suddenly, without any connecting phrases, the letter plunges into an incident which had occurred that day in Jerusalem.

"I visited a synagogue of the Polish Jews here, having some business of minor Importance with one of their Melamedins, or Ushers. It is a small room, below Street-level, furnished as well as their Poverty permits of. There was an Inscription of some sort at the Lectern, but they had been burning Candles by it for so long that it was obscured by Soot and Smoke.

"Only the single word Hamatho *was visible, and I confess to you, Dear Brother, that when I saw this word, which means, His Wrath, a Shudder seized me, and I groaned aloud. Alas! How much have I done to merit His Wrath . . . ."*

And then, without further explanation, he reverts to his ramble in Asia Minor. His party had come over the Duz-bel Pass to a miserable Turkish village east of Mt. Koressos, *"a wretched marshy neighborhood where I was loth to stop, fearing the Ague. But some of the Mules required to be shod, and we were preceded at the forge by some Turkishes officers, Yezz Bashy or Bimm Bashi, or like preposterous Rank and Title. So there was no help for it. It promised to take Hours, and I went a-walking."* Henry Taylor soon left the village behind and found himself in wild country. He had no fears for his safety, or of being lost, he explained, because he had pistols and a small horn always about him. By and by he entered a sort of small valley down which a stream rushed, and there, drinking at a pool, he saw a woman.

"She was dark, with black Eyes and Hair, buxom and exceedingly comely. I thought of the Line in the Canticle: I am black but beautiful. Alas! That I did not call to mind those other lines, also of Solomon, about the Strange Woman. And yet it was, I suppose, just as well, for 'Out of the Strong came forth Sweet.'"

On seeing her, he freely confesses, he had no hopes other than for an amorous adventure, and was encouraged by her lack of shyness. He spoke to her in Turkish, but she shook her head. She understood Greek, however, though her accent was strange to him, and she said that her name was Diana. She offered him a drink from her cup, he accepted, and they fell into conversation.

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"Although she gave no Details about her Home, and I pressed her for none, I understood that she was without present Family and was in what we should call Reduced Circumstances. For she spoke of Times past, when she had many Maid Servants and much Wealth, and the tears stood in her Eyes. I took her hand and she offered no objections."

The next lines are written in ink of a different color, as if he had put off writing until another time. Then, *"In short, Brother, I pursued the Way usual to me in those Days, and although she gave me her Lips, I was not content to stop, but was emboldened to thrust my Hand into her Bodice . . . and thus perceived in very short order that she was not a Human Female but an Unnatural Monstrosity. I firmly believe, and was encouraged in my Belief by a worthy Divine of the Eastern Church to whom I revealed the Matter, that this Creature who called herself* Diana *had no Natural Existence, but was a Dæmon, called forth, I first thought, by the Devil himself. . . .*

"I am now convinced that she was a very Type of Lust, sent to test or prove me. That is, to horrify me in that same Sin in which I had so long wallowed, and to turn those Features, in which I had intended to take illicit Delight, into a Terror and Revulsion. I ran, I am not ashamed to own it, until I fell bleeding and exhausted at the Forge, and was taken by a Fever of which I am long recovering. . . ."

According to the standards of his time there was only one thing for him to do under the circumstances, and he did it. He got religion. There had lately been established in Jerusalem an office of the British and Overseas Society for the Circulation of Uncorrupted Anglican Versions of the Scriptures; Henry Taylor became a colporteur, or agent, of this Society, and was sent among the native Christians of Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, and Persia.

He never knew, because he died before it became known, that the Turkish village where he had his shocking experience was near the site of the ancient city of Ephesus. Its famous Temple of Diana was one of the Seven Wonders of the World and was served by hundreds of priestesses and visited by pilgrims in throngs. But that was before the Apostle Paul came that way and *"Many of those which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men."* But not every one in Ephesus was so quickly convinced.

A certain *"Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana . . . called together the workmen of like occupation, and said . . . that not alone in Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia,*

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this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger . . . but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion. . . ."

"I am also filled with confusion," Don said. "First we hear about this Limey, Taylor: he tries to grab a feel and gets the screaming meemies. All of a sudden—a Bible class."

Jim clicked his tongue. "That *word*—it's slipped my mind again. Poly—? Ploy—?"

"Patience," Fred pleaded. "Why aren't you more patient?"

The confusion in Ephesus [Fred said] was finally ended by a city official who "*appeased*" the mob by asking, "*What man is there that knoweth not now that the City of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? . . . Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.*"

Long after Henry Taylor's time, the archeologists uncovered the temple site. Among the many images they found was one which may perhaps be that same one "*which fell down from Jupiter.*" It is carven from black meteoric stone, and was obviously intended for reverence in fertility rituals, for the goddess is naked to the waist, and has, not two breasts, but a multitude, a profusion of them, clustering over the front of the upper torso. . . .

"Well, you're not going to make too much out of this story, are you?" Jim asked. "Obviously this condition was hereditary in that district, and your pal, H. Taylor, just happened to meet up with a woman who had it, as well as the name Diana."

"It is certainly a curious coincidence, if nothing more," said Fred.

Don wanted to know what finally became of Henry Taylor. "He convert any of the natives?"

"No. They converted him. He became a priest."

"You mean, *he gave up women?*"

"Oh, no: Celibacy is not incumbent upon priests of the Eastern Church. He married."

"But not one of those babes from the Greater Ephesus area, I'll bet," Don said.

Jim observed, musingly, "It's too bad old Alexander Graham Bell didn't know about this. He needn't have bothered with sheep.

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Of course, it *takes* longer with people—"

Fred pointed out that Dr. Bell had been an old man at the time.

"He could have set up a foundation. I would have been *glad* to carry on the great work. It wouldn't frighten *me,* like it did Taylor. . . . Say, you wouldn't know, approximately, how *many* this Diana had—?"

"It must sure have taken a lot out of Taylor, all right," Don said. "I bet he was never much good at anything afterwards."

Fred took one last swallow of his last drink. The jug and bottle, he observed, were empty. "Oh, I don't know about that," he said. "In the last letter he wrote to his brother before the latter's death, he says: *'My dear Wife has observed my sixty-fifth Birthday by presenting me with my Fifth Son and ninth Child. . . . I preach Sunday next on the Verse, "His Leaf Also Shall not Wither" (Psalms 1: 3).'"*

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot

In 3299, Ferdinand Feghoot took his youngest son to Hawaii 1960 for a real old-fashioned *luau.* They both wore aloha shirts, and their telephatic translator was disguised as a coconut. "Remember," warned Feghoot. "Do *just* what they do."

He adjusted the time-bulb to return in four hours—and presto! there they were. Sure enough, a big *luau* was in progress. But it wasn't a 1960 *luau.* The beach was crowded with naked Hawaiians armed with war-clubs.

"Well, well—two more courses!" growled their king, who was wearing an antique British naval officer's coat.

Feghoot saw that a slight error had taken them back to 1779, just as their hosts were about to eat Captain Cook—who, indeed, smelled very savory. "We dropped in for potluck," he said quickly, trusting to traditional Hawaiian hospitality.

"We-ell, I guess we can spare a chop," grunted the king, passing a couple. "Mighty tasty too, I must say."

"But I don't *want* to eat humans!" piped up the boy.

It was a critical moment—but Ferdinand Feghoot handled it with his usual aplomb. "Go ahead, eat it," he said with a smile. "One man's meat is another man's poi, son."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON

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There is no need to "introduce" the creator of Horatio Hornblower and the author of non-naval novels as diversely admirable as THE AFRICAN QUEEN *and* PAYMENT DEFERRED. *Here is the latest of Mr. Forester's rare fantasies: a riddle story with a singularly ominous ending.*

Marjorie Is Still Waiting

by C. S. FORESTER

IT WAS ONLY A LITTLE KITTEN, JUST old enough to be taken from its mother, and there was no reason why Marjorie should go as pale as death at the sight of it. I had indeed telephoned beforehand and had received Marjorie's permission to bring a kitten as one of my birthday presents for her daughter Ann. It was an odd and attractive-looking creature, too, which I had selected for that very reason—a little white kitten with a tortoise-shell head and tail, and yet Marjorie went white and faint at the sight of it.

It was natural that George should be alarmed—George is Marjorie's husband and my friend.

"Whatever's the matter, dear?" he asked.

"Nothing. I'm all right," said Marjorie; that was hard to believe, but she would naturally try to conceal any faintness she felt because it was the moment when her eight-year-old's birthday party was beginning.

It was not until next day that she telephoned and asked me to come and see her—I am a sort of honorary uncle to Marjorie and George, and so an honorary great-uncle to Ann and her brothers and sisters.

Marjorie was still a little pale when she greeted me, and when, after we had sat down, she began to ask me questions, she leaned forward and watched my face with an intensity unusual for her.

"Why did you bring that kitten?" she asked.

"But I asked you first if you minded," I said. "You told me—"

"But why did you bring *that* kitten? That particular kitten—white except for its head and tail?"

"I picked it out from the litter—I thought it looked rather amusing. Don't you like it? Could I—?"

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"You're sure? You didn't have any other reason?"

"Of course. What reason could I have? Why are you asking me this, dear?"

"I have a reason," said Marjorie.

"I'd like to hear about it," I said.

"You'd laugh at me."

"I've laughed at you before, dear, and you've lived through it. Tell me: What's the trouble? I haven't any idea."

"You could laugh at me, but this is serious. You don't know how serious."

"Tell me, then. You know I'll help all I can."

"It was at Nottingham Goose Fair" . . . began Marjorie, and hesitated again.

"Tell me," I said.

Marjorie told me the story, hesitantly—I had to ask questions to keep the narrative flowing at all.

Marjorie comes from Nottingham in England, and Nottingham Goose Fair is the annual local carnival. The one Marjorie was talking about was the last one "before the war"—and in England that means 1938. Marjorie was a girl of eighteen then, and at the last peacetime Goose Fair she had her fortune told.

"It was The Great Delfino," she said. "I thought he'd be just the ordinary sort of fortuneteller before I went into his tent."

"And he wasn't?" I asked.

"He was different. He was strange."

"All fortunetellers try to be different and strange," I pointed out.

"He was different and—and—he seemed to be . . . mischievous."

"Mischievous?"

"Yes. You might almost say he was spiteful. Later on, that is. He was a little dark man with a sort of falsetto laugh. A giggle."

"Odd that he should have made such an impression," was my comment.

"You don't know how clever he was. I didn't myself at the time, of course. Not all that was going to happen. The tent wasn't very well-lighted and when I went in he took both my hands in his and led me forward. 'Ha ha! A soldier, I see,' was the first thing he said. And I think he giggled even then. I couldn't understand what he meant, and I said so. 'Time will show,' was what he said. It sounded all nonsense to me—I was only eighteen and it was peacetime then. But it wasn't more than a couple of years before I *was* a soldier, and you know it."

Marjorie served her country in uniform for four and a half years.

"Then he went on for a little while just like any ordinary fortuneteller. You know the sort of thing—a dark stranger, and a journey overseas, and five pretty children. But of course the five

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children part of it wasn't quite ordinary—those were the days when people of my social grade only planned to have one or two children. I don't know if it was that that fixed what he said so firmly in my mind, or whether it was his manner, but I remembered every word. Then he went on from there."

"And what did he say?"

"He said—he said—oh, I don't want to tell you what he said. He said it all in that funny high-pitched voice, giggling all the time, as if he was enjoying it. I think he was. I ought to have run away, but I couldn't. I simply couldn't. I had to stand there with my hands in his and listen to it all. You don't know how . . . horrible it was."

"I wish you'd tell me what he said," I said, as gently as I could; Marjorie was white, and seemed on the point of breakdown.

"No I can't. I couldn't say those things even to myself. But he said he could see a white cat—a white cat with a tortoise-shell head and tail. Those were the very words he said."

"But it was the purest chance —" I began, doing my best.

"Yes, the purest chance." Marjorie was speaking more loudly now. "And was it the purest chance about the other things? The dark stranger—that was George. And the journey overseas, and the five pretty children? Here I am in California with my five children. And there were other things too—I haven't told you them all, not nearly."

"I wish you would," I persisted.

"No, I can't." It was nearly a scream now. "I can't—I tell you I can't."

Nor would she tell me any more, despite my urging. She was waiting for something to happen, something too horrible for her to express. I would give a great deal to know.

When I went to England I made inquiries; I have a wide circle of friends in all sorts of professions who are often glad to help me. A Chief Constable is one of my friends. It was not long before he had a list of the people who paid for licences to operate at Nottingham Goose Fair that year, even though it was twenty years ago.

"The Great Delfino?" he said, looking at the list.

"Yes. A little dark man with a high-pitched voice."

"Are you sure it wasn't Madame Fleurie? It wasn't Gypsy Jack Jennings?"

"No, it was the Great Delfino."

"I'm sorry. There wasn't any Great Delfino at Nottingham Goose Fair in 1938."

So there the matter rests.

Rests? Marjorie is waiting for something horrible to happen.

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To American scholars of religion or education, the name Charles G. Finney means the nineteenth-century Congregational evangelist who founded Oberlin in 1833. But to connoisseurs of fantasy the one and only authentic Charles G. Finney is his great-grandson, author of the incomparable THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO *(Viking, 1935; now available in the Bantam anthology, edited by Ray Bradbury,* THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO AND OTHER IMPROBABLE STORIES). *This softspoken Tucson newspaperman, who is now 53 and looks a good decade younger, has written regrettably little since that masterpiece; but now, 23 years after his debut as a novelist, he brings us his first short story. It's a tale of high nobility and deep villainy, of virtue rewarded and vice baffled—all told with the same gentle deadpan humor which marked Oliver La Farge's* Spud and Cochise *(F&SF, December, 1957) . . . and which suggests that these dry Arizona fantasies may indeed be the true Adult Western.*

The Horsenaping of Hotspur

by CHARLES G. FINNEY

IN THE ARROYO COUNTRY AN HOUR'S drive from Manacle, Arizona, were two habitations just three miles apart, airline distance. One was as manorial and well kept as any rural abode in these entire United States. The other was of such sullen squalor that it could only be likened to the unpleasant den of an unsocial animal which reveled in obnoxiousness.

In the one lived Henry Percy, rich rancher, kind father, expert husbandman, philanthropist, and king of the countryside. With him lived his adoring family and his no less adoring retinue.

In the other lived Poverty Booger, a scowling scoundrel, sinbesotted, slothful, saturnine, and snarling. As companion to him lived Injún Joe, a quarter-breed as unwholesome as his host.

Henry Percy raised horses, the finest nags in all that vast expanse of Southern Arizona.

Under Poverty Booger's care were a buzzard named Battlescar, a coatimundi named Cisco, and a mongrel dog named Pedro. The buzzard looked like a Phorkyad, the mongrel like a Tasmanian

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Devil, and the coati like a nightmare.

On the afternoon of this story, all was calm at Henry Percy's, and all was also calm at Poverty Booger's.

At Percy's, the hour of siesta held sway.

At Booger's, cookery was being done.

The previous evening, Cisco and Pedro had caught a jackrabbit and had brought it home to their master. The animals made their forays in concert with Battlescar the buzzard. That canny bird, soaring on remorseless wings, would sight the prey and signal so to Cisco and Pedro. If the prey chose to flee, Pedro would run it down, for Pedro was half coyote and as speedy as a greyhound. If the prey chose to burrow, Cisco would dig it out, for Cisco could excavate with the facility of a giant mole. If the prey chose to climb a tree, Cisco would climb after it, and Battlescar would dive at it, until the prey became so bedeviled that it would fling itself from the branches into Pedro's waiting jaws. No rabbit, no squirrel, no gopher ever escaped that deadly trio.

Now, singing to himself in his shack, Poverty Booger was busy with his rabbit-cooking. Outside, Cisco and Pedro were gnawing on the rabbit's feet and hide and head; and Battlescar was waiting for the entrails to ripen.

Booger cut up the meat and seared it in his encrusted skillet. Then he dumped it in a pot and covered it with water. Into that he crushed a dried chile pepper, and he added chunks of dried squash. He put the pot on the fire to simmer, then patted wet cornmeal into tortillas and set the tortillas to cook on a sheet of corrugated iron beaten flat.

"Thet there looks good an' smells good," commented Injun Joe, at ease upon a pallet of gunny sacks. "Leave us hev a drink fer an appertizer."

He arose and reached into his tattered coat, extracting therefrom a bottle of 45-cent sherry wine. "Whur'd you git thet wine?" demanded Booger, one-third in suspicion, two-thirds in delight.

"Ah found a dollar in Manacle," explained Injun Joe. "So ah bought two bottles of sherry, and also acquired a fifth of whiskey on mah charge account. Ah still got a dime in change."

Booger took the bottle from him and poured a cupful into the jackrabbit stew. "Tuh give it a tang," he explained. He then took a good soldierly slug of it himself.

He considered a moment. "Ah think ah'll make a wassail bowl," he said.

"Whot's thet?" asked Injun Joe.

"Hit's anothern of mah coolinary specialities," said Booger. "Gimme the rest of thet likker you stole."

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"Bought," corrected Injun Joe.

"Gimme it," said Booger.

He took the three-gallon tin can he used as a water jug and emptied a third of it on the floor. Into the remaining two gallons he poured the whiskey and the bottles of wine. He added some crumpled chile and stirred the concoction with a stick. "Thar," he said. "Thar's the wassail bowl." He tasted it. "Wow!"

"Leave me try it," said Injun Joe eagerly.

"Help yerself," said Booger. "They's two whole gallon an' more of the stuff, an' it's pahrful enough to run an airyplane."

At Henry Percy's, the siesta over, the family was having afternoon tea. In Percy's well-kept stalls, corrals and pastures, Percy's well-groomed horses munched their hay and oats.

Matron of Percy's herd was Julie, a big black mare of placid mien and gentle eyes. Whenever the other horses had troubles they always took them to Julie, for Julie was wondrous wise. Julie's stable companion was a medium-size bullsnake named Toro. Toro's mother had once laid a clutch of eggs in Julie's stall, and Toro was the only one to hatch. Toro's mother abandoned him, and Julie raised him. They were now inseparable friends.

Pride of Percy's herd was a young stallion called Hotspur. He was the swiftest and most beautiful horse in that part of Southern Arizona, and Percy often said he would not take a million dollars for him. Percy meant this, too, for he already had a million dollars.

Down again at Booger's, Poverty and Injun Joe, full to bursting with jackrabbit stew, took the can of firewater Booger had mixed and went out under the trees to enjoy the cool of the early evening. Battlescar the buzzard slept on Booger's well top. Pedro and Cisco slept in Booger's fly-infested wickiup.

Booger and Joe reclined beneath a mesquite tree. In the branches above them perched a slim gray figure: Molina the mockingbird, who wished that they would go away so that he might sing. He knew if he sang now one of them would throw a rock at him.

"What we need, Booger," said Injun Joe, "is some working capital."

"How we gonna git it?" demanded Booger.

"Thet's what ah'm studyin' at," said Joe. "Ah bin thinkin' about thet hoss of Hennery Percy's. The one they call Hotspur."

"So," said Booger.

"Ah betcha," said Joe, "Hennery Percy'd pay handsome to git Hotspur back if he was missin'. Percy's mighty fond of thet plug."

"So," said Booger.

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"So," said Joe, "if Hotspur was missin' an' if we was to tell Hennery Percy whur to find him, mebbe Hennery Percy'd give us a reward, mebbe as much as fifty dollars."

"Air you suggestin' we steal thet hoss?" cried Booger. For the Code of the West, which is the law in that part of Southern Arizona, deals severely with horsethieves. A man who shoots his wife may, and often does, get off free. But a man who steals a horse is always punished.

"Not stealin'," said Joe. "Jest hidin' him out somewhur. An' then accidentally findin' him when Hennery Percy starts lookin'."

"Thet's horsenapin'," said Booger.

"What if it is?" asked Joe.

"Pass the punch," said Booger. "Leave me think on it. Fifty dollars. Hmmm."

The upshot of his cogitations was a plan to go to Percy's after dark, lure Hotspur out of his corral with a piece of squash, and then hide Hotspur in the deep brush. "We'll leave Cisco an' Pedro an' Battlescar home till we git Hotspur hid, an' then they kin stand guard fer us."

"An' we jest set back an' wait fer Percy to go lookin', an' then we find Hotspur and collect the reward," said Joe.

"Right," said Booger. "Pass the punch."

"When do we start?" asked Joe.

Booger estimated the contents of the wassail bowl. "Two hours afore the dawn," he said.

Above them in the mesquite tree, the horrified Molina took down everything they said with the accuracy of a tape recorder. His horror became transmuted into action, for he knew he could wait no longer. Molina took off like a feathered dart and flew through the gathering gloom toward the Henry Percy ranch.

"What was thet noise?" asked Injun Joe.

"Jest a little bird," said Poverty Booger.

"Little birds mean nuthin' to me," said Joe. "Pass the punch."

Molina winged his way over the tops of the giant cactus and the mesquite trees to Henry Percy's place in six minutes flat, thereby setting a new speed record for mockingbirds in that part of Southern Arizona.

He found Julie in her stall, gently scolding Toro for something the bullsnake had done or failed to do that day. Molina naturally had gone to Julie, just as all the other gentle creatures did when they had troubles.

"Julie! Julie!" chattered Molina, alighting on a rafter well out of Toro's reach. "Julie! Julie! Terrible things are afoot."

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Julie. "Tell me quickly."

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"Two terrible men are planning to horsenap Hotspur, Julie! It's the most dreadful thing. They are sitting under a mesquite tree laying their plans now. They are drinking too, Julie! They have their drink in a huge tin can, the most vile concoction you ever dreamed of. They plan to horsenap Hotspur two hours before the dawn and hide him out in the brush, and then wait for Mr. Percy to ransom him. Oh, it's terrible, Julie! Terrible! I came to you as fast as my wings would carry me. I set a new speed record for mockingbirds in Southern Arizona. And I was just getting ready to sing, Julie! Just getting ready to sing at sunset like I always do. You know how I sing, Julie: first like a thrush, then like a sparrow, then like that parakeet I heard in Manacle, and then that song Papa Mocker taught me when I was a fledgling. Oh, how beautiful that song is when I sing it! And I was just getting ready to sing, Julie, when those awful men came along with their liquor and started to talk about horsenaping Hotspur. Oh, Julie, Julie, whatever will I do?"

Molina's alarm transferred itself to Julie, for horsenaping was a horrible thing, almost as bad as horse-stealing.

"Who are the men, Molina?" Julie asked in a strained voice.

"One is Poverty Booger and the other is Injun Joe," said Molina.

"And you say they are drinking?"

"Just as fast as they can pour it down, Julie."

"Drinking men fear snakes," said Julie after a long moment of consideration. "I know a way to stop that horsenaping in its tracks. We have many hours left to us. Toro, summon the clans."

"What?" gasped Toro. "Why, that is only done in times of direst emergency."

"That time has arrived," said Julie. "Summon the clans."

"But what will I tell them?"

"Tell them that two bad men will attempt to steal Hotspur two hours before the dawn, and that their help is needed to thwart the bad men."

"I don't think the clans will like it," said Toro. "I don't think the Grand Master will like it."

"You tell them," said Julie, "that these bad men plan to do harm to Mr. Henry Percy, and you point out to them that the only place the clans are safe any more is on Mr. Henry Percy's ranch, and that they owe this help to Mr. Percy."

For the clans which Toro were to summon were the snake clans and, indeed, ever since Henry Percy had acquired his property he had forbidden anyone to kill a snake or harm it in any way on his land; and that was a very unusual thing for a person to do, because, in a way, even the Code of the West hints that snakes

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ought to be killed on sight, which is one of the few flaws in that great document.

"Very well," said Toro. "For Mr. Henry Percy's sake, I will summon the clans."

And he dropped from Julie's manger down onto the ground and slid out of the stall and across the corral and into the greasewood thicket. And, once deep in the thicket, he sent out the call to the clans.

"What's up?" asked a Leconte's snake which was very near and was the first to arrive.

"Treachery to Henry Percy," said Toro.

Then seven red racers came whipping through the greasewood like coppery streaks. Two Sonoran racers followed them, proud gray beauties with pink throats and big luminous eyes. Then came some black racers, and then a whole family of bull snakes, cousins, aunts and uncles to Toro. And garter snakes came, and night snakes, and lyre snakes, and hog-nosed snakes, and king snakes. And then a monster black snake, ten feet long, came winding in. He was an indigo snake from Texas that had escaped from a traveling sideshow; he obeyed the summons as readily as any of the Arizona reptiles.

When he heard horsenaping was afoot, he was agog with enthusiasm to join his Arizona brethren in its prevention.

"Us Texicans," he proclaimed, "hates hossnapin' wuss than ary other thing on this hull earth. An' when a Texican hates, he really despises. You sidewinders here in Airyzoney, cain't even begin to vizoolize what fiery hate a Texican kin generate when he gits riled up properly. Whar is them thar miscreants at, Toro? Ah aims to take 'em on single-handed fer the glory of dear ole Texis." The indigo snake's name was Alamo; a Lone Star was tattooed in red on his head plates.

"Calm yourself, Alamo," said Toro. "We can't do anything until the Grand Master gets here."

More snakes kept coming in from all points of the compass, and in only a few minutes the greasewood thicket was alive with them, some on the ground, some in the bushes, some coiled, some at full length.

Then, afar off, the whirr of tiny, brittle drums could be heard: The rattlers were approaching. The little ones came first, the gray rattlers, the horned rattlers, the green rattlers, the Price's rattlers, and the tiger rattlers. Following them came the blacktail rattlers from the foothills and the black diamondbacks from the mountains. Then came the shock troops of Arizona viperhood, the desert diamondbacks, gray, dusty, venomous, killers all. And in their midst was the Grand Master, a desert rattler seven feet long, five

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inches thick, with twenty rattles on his tail, and inch-long fangs in his head.

He slid rapidly into the center of the throng of serpents, coiled, reared his massive head, and shook his castanets for a full thirty seconds.

"Who summoned the clans?" he demanded.

"I did," said Toro, secretly wishing *he* was seven feet long and had twenty rattles on his tail and inch-long poison fangs in his jaws.

"For what purpose?" demanded the Grand Master.

And Toro related to him the reason for the summons.

When Toro had finished, the Grand Master said: "There is only one man in the whole world, whom I would wrinkle a scale to help, and that man is Henry Percy. Any other man in the world can always expect my fangs but never my help. Henry Percy, however, has provided sanctuary for snakes, and snakes now have an opportunity to repay Henry Percy. You did well, Toro, to summon the clans."

Then the Grand Master laid out his strategy. There was only one trail from Poverty Booger's place to Henry Percy's. The snakes would station themselves in groups of ten along that trail and harry the horsethieves with hisses, rattles, and scurryings in the underbrush as the thieves made their way toward Percy's. After the two men had been subjected to that treatment for perhaps a mile and a half, they would be confronted in the clearing below Percy's stables by seventeen of the biggest desert diamond backs, commanded in person by the Grand Master. This platoon of seventeen would rattle in unison and move toward the thieves as the spokes of a wheel converge on the hub. If the thieves broke and ran for it, well and good: Let them go.

If the thieves chose to put up a fight, the desert rattlers would bite and bite hard, and the Grand Master himself would deliver the coup de grâce.

"Is everything understood?" demanded the Grand Master.

"Aye," said the assembled serpents.

"To your posts, then," said the Master. "Little snakes first and farthest down the trail. Medium snakes next. You red racers will act as scouts and keep everybody informed. We have several hours. Snakes away!"

And the greasewood thicket writhed as the clans headed for their stations.

"I reckon," said Injun Joe, "it's time to git about our bizness." Before arriving at that reckoning he had shaken the three-gallon can and found it empty. "I propose we jest walk down the trail, seize thet hoss Hotspur, and take

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him off in the bresh and hide him. Thet's about as simple as I figger it kin be done."

"Right, right," said Poverty Booger, lurching to his feet. "Let's keep her simple. My haid is spinning."

"The walk'll clear it," said Injun Joe. "Gimme yer hand. I'm jest a mite onsteady."

They staggered down the trail, the moon illuminating the pathway for them. Behind them in the mesquite tree, a bird began to sing of joy and eggs and fat berries and safe nests. It was Molina catching up with his music after his return to his perch.

After walking about twenty minutes, Poverty Booger said to Injun Joe: "I keep hearing somethin'. Somethin' in the underbresh."

"Lizards," said Injun Joe. "They all time pester around at night."

A long thin shiny black streak swept across the trail in front. Then two more black streaks crossed the trail from the opposite direction. From either side of the trail loud hisses seared the air.

"Thet ain't lizards," said Poverty Booger, stopping. "Thet's snakes!"

"It's the matin' season fer snakes and other reptyles," said Injun Joe. "They always act like thet. Come on."

The hissings and the flashings across the path grew almost incessant. Injun Joe finally became more nervous than Poverty Booger. "Seems like," he said, "every durn snake in the hull Southwest is corngregated along thisyere trail. Gitcha a club, Booger, and start beatin' 'em away."

"You git the club," said Booger. "Ah ain't aiming to pick no fight with a herd of snakes. Not tonight I ain't."

"If yer afraid," said Injun Joe, "jest say so, and thet's thet. Now, take me: I hain't afraid." And he stepped off the trail and picked up what he thought was a long black pole.

But instead of being a pole it was Alamo. As Injun Joe stooped, Alamo looped and struck, his jaws jabbing harmlessly in Injun Joe's long beard. Injun Joe let out a scream and leaped back to the trail.

"Har, har, har!" roared Poverty Booger, "Ain't scared, huh? Jest an ole stick layin' in the bresh, and it scares yuh."

"Thet warn't no stick," said the trembling Joe. "Thet was a snake fifteen foot long if it was an inch. It struck at me. I think I been snake-bit, Booger."

"Are you in pain?" asked Booger.

"I feel sort of numb," said Joe.

"Snake pison stings; it don't numb," said Booger. "You ain't been snake-bit. Come on. Let's go."

And they pursued their way again. And the rustlings and the

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hissings and the swishings grew louder and louder.

"Ah cain't make it no further," said Injun Joe at last. "Thar is jest too many reptyles along this daggone trail to suit me. The sign ain't right tonight fer hossnapin'. Leave us go back to yer diggins, Booger, and figger out some other project."

Poverty Booger was as nervous as Injun Joe, but his moral fiber was a little more fibrous. "Right ahead is the clearin'," he said. "We're in sight of our goal, Joe. Let's not quit now." Teeth chattering, he took Injun Joe by the arm and steered him toward the clearing.

The noises which had plagued them along the trail ceased. A profound silence, which seemed to flow down from the moon herself, blanketed the air as they stepped into the open ground.

They took ten steps apiece, and then the silence ended. A buzzing crackle arose like the shaking of a million dried peas in a gigantic dried pod. Gray shapes, like huge dusty worms, slid into the clearing. These were the shock troops, the big desert diamondbacks the Grand Master had mustered for the last stand.

They moved in straight lines, heads upraised, rattles fairly burning in the air. The clearing was covered with them. They converged on the horsenapers.

"Look, Joe!" gibbered Booger. "Jest look! Rattly snakes. Everywhere is rattly snakes! They is attactin' us, Joe. Listen to 'em buzz."

"You listen," said Joe. "Ah'm gittin'. This night ah hev seen forty-'leven too many snakes."

And he turned and fled down the trail, and Poverty Booger fled after him.

The Grand Master halted the march of the desert diamondbacks. He sent out the red racers to congratulate the clans and dismiss them. It had been a successful night. Toro wriggled back to the stables and told Julie all was well.

"I knew it would be," said Julie. "I was never the tiniest bit disturbed. For the Code of the West, Toro, states firmly that the forces of good will always triumph over the forces of evil." And Julie closed her big, gentle eyes and went to sleep.

As for Poverty Booger and Injun Joe, they returned to Booger's diggings, barricaded the door, and chinked up the cracks. A day later hunger overcame their fear, and they removed the barricades.

Pedro, Cisco and Battlescar teamed up to provide another jackrabbit. With a sigh and a curse at the monotony of the fare they were having, Booger cooked up another jackrabbit-and-squash stew.

Some Papago Indians, passing

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the place in their government truck, smelled the rabbit cooking and stopped off to get a bite to eat. Seeing the straits in which Booger and Joe were living, the Papagos, after eating up all the stew, took up a collection among themselves and gave Booger and Joe two dollars and eighteen cents and six cans of beer.

Other Papagos, passing Booger's place after that, always stopped for a dish of Booger's rabbit stew. So many Papagos stopped so often that Booger had to erect a ramada for them to eat in. Injun Joe was constantly washing dishes. Battlescar, Pedro and Cisco were constantly on the trail for more rabbits.

The Papagos spread word about the unique dish Booger cooked at his diggings. It became fashionable for the rich people of Manacle to come there at night and dine in the extoic surroundings.

The overhead was low. The money poured in. Booger bought a fire-engine-red Jaguar.

Some years later, he ran for the school board and was elected, defeating Henry Percy. For the Code of the West says a man's past shall never be held against him, particularly when he starts making money.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: *I haven't been well for the past year (the winter was tough even in California); I've been trying to accomplish improbably much; and I seem to have reached a peculiar age (47, to be blunt) when I want to explore more of myself than is touched upon by my current activities. So I'm taking a sabbatical (or whatever one correctly calls it after 9 years) from editing F&SF. For the next six months or so, the magazine will be edited by Robert P. Mills, who has been a vital factor in F&SF ever since its inception, with the tasteful and ingenious William Tenn at his right hand. Nobody contemplates any changes in policy or style — except those always involved in the unceasing effort to make F&SF fresh, lively, stimulating and creative. I'll still be around as a book reviewer and, I hope, occasionally as a fiction writer (that's one of the areas I want to explore) — and, like you, as a reader eagerly looking forward to what comes up next.* — ANTHONY BOUCHER

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Science Fiction Marches On . . .

The rising popularity of science fiction among the cultural leaders of the nation, as well as among the people at large, is ample testimony of its vitality and maturity. Engineers, physicians, chemists, statesmen, educators – they have all found pleasure and enlightenment in science fiction.

Now, Dr. Gilbert Highet, the distinguished classical scholar, critic, and judge of the Book-of-the-Month Club, reviewing his tenure as literary critic for *Harper's Magazine*, makes special point of *"the steady improvement in science fiction, or rather fantasy-fiction . . ."* and labels it as *"one of the most interesting general trends"* that he has observed recently.

And J. Donald Adams, former editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, author and editor of its celebrated page 2, "Speaking of Books," has given science fiction the accolade of the highest standards of literary criticism. He says:

"I am . . . convinced that science fiction, in spite of the vast amount of silly and clumsy writing the genre has spawned, is deserving of the serious attention it is only now beginning to receive. . . . It is at once a literature of escape and one deeply and earnestly concerned with mankind's present plight and its problematical future."

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